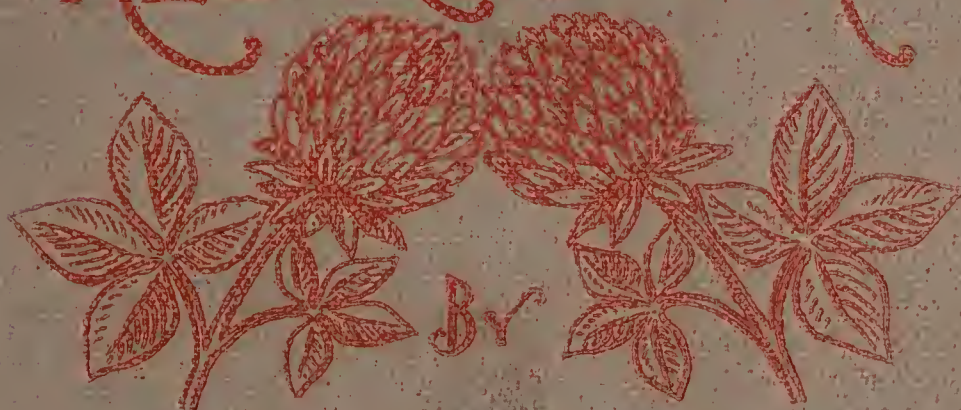


RED KLOVER



KLARENC WADE MAK, M.D.
(THE FOOL KILLER)



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KLARENG WADE MAK. M. D.
(THE FOOL-KILLER)

HUMORIST, NOVELIST AND POET

BORN IN IOWA AND REARED IN THE MIDDLE WEST

RED KLOVER

BY

KLARENC WADE MAK, M. D.

(THE FOOL KILLER)

Author of Mak's Grammar; Laws of Health; Mental Dynamite; Echoes from the Heart; The Fool-Killer; Padded Lightning; Double Fist; The Outlaw and Suffrajette; A Strange Case; A Super-Crook; Joe's Baby; A Rare Jewel; Dr. Nobody from Nowhere; How They Cured Him of Flirting; The End of a Long Trail; Warm Wireless Waves; Love's Marathon; He Met Her in Kansas City; Peaches and Cream; Little Fence Corners; Riverology; The Bigamist.



This book contains five of the author's best stories, as follows:

THE OUTLAW AND SUFFRAJET;
A STRANGE CASE; or, THE MAN WITH FOUR SOULS;
THE END OF A LONG TRAIL; or, DID HE WIN THE CASE;
DR. NOBODY FROM NOWHERE;
JOE'S BABY.

The above stories are the greatest romances ever written, and will grip you and thrill you from first to last. They are real literature, and free from the usual cant and piffle. They are full of refined wit and good humor, and go clear to the bottom of human nature. They are full of rare word-painting that has never been excelled. If you laugh yourself to death, the author will pay your funeral expenses. Let's go!



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By Klarenc Wade Mak, M. D.
Kansas City, Missouri

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RED KLOVER.

THE OUTLAW AND SUFFRAJET.

CHAPTER I.

Mr. Kutly Deep Badd first got a squint of this ruff and stormy old planet over in the mountainous regions of Eastern Kentucky—an environment well suited for developing hard and rugged characters; in fact, no other kind of characters could long survive in such strenuous surroundings. Here Nature is penurious and it takes hard grubbing and eternal vigilance and continuous struggle to keep in advance of the gaunt and hungry *Wolf of Want*. Only those best fitted for the race got by and left their footprints on the hard and jagged soil. Books and school-houses were few and far apart in this relentless region at the time of the events I am relating, but circuit-riders (*pioneer sky-chauffeurs*), tobacco, dogs, rifles and moonshine whisky were current everywhere. While the natives of this hard and rugged region were lacking in book-learning and the refinements and camouflage of modern society, they were not a bit lacking in pride, deep affection, bravery and loyalty.

An insult was usually taken up and settled right on the spot, and the one who was quickest with his gun or Bowie-knife had the satisfaction of attending the other's funeral. Kut's father did a little primitive farming on the side and a good deal of moonshining on the *back*, and his young son naturally followed in the footsteps of his ancestor, and by the time he was eighteen there were few men who were his equal with the ever-ready rifle and pistol. Kut was 6 feet and 3 inches up as the bee buzzes, and very angular and muscular. His muscles were hard like bands of steel. After his nineteenth year he seldom weighed less than 225 in the shade. He soon acquired the reputation of being the best wrestler, foot-racer and all-around athlete in his naborhood; but when it came to the sex immediately opposite, Kut was considerable of a coward; in fact, most any little old piece of calico could scare him back into the brush by shaking her apron at him and saying "Boo!" However, when he was about eleven he met his calico Waterloo at the ruff log school-house of the Roaring Winds naborhood. His inamorata was a pretty and petite little blonde with a wealth of golden-bronze hair, features that Nature exhausted all her skill in fashioning, and a pair of those strange and mystic lavender-moonlit eyes that had a soft and rippling thrill.

They seemed like the shadowed ripples of a mountain brook flirting with the wild flowers that dream along its banks. They were those quiet, sleepy, volcanic eyes that just waltz right up to you on the *Southwind*, step on your heart with both feet, and then stand there and make sweet and provoking faces at your soul. She possessed hands and feet that were as dainty and delicate as a canary cricket; but her mouth was large and her lips were that ripe and dangerous sort that make men forget their wives and defy Hell. Her movements were sinuous and graceful like a vagrant sunbeam remaining to kiss the flowers a soft and lingering good-night. Her name was Canary Fern Woods, and she was the idol and only child of her father—the Rev. Lascellus Pendleton Woods, from—well, nobody knew where, as the reverend gentleman and his little moonbeam of a daughter had always refused to discuss their genealogy with their neighbors. The Rev. Woods was a man of more than ordinary education and was a powerful exhorter and natural leader. He was fairly well liked in the neighborhood of Roaring Winds; but still there were many in the country thereabout who did not fully trust him—notwithstanding his deep piety and apparently upright life—due, probably, to the fact that he was too silent on where he came from before mysteriously appearing in the Roaring Winds neighborhood and beginning his ministry of the gospel of Christ. It is an *in-bred* and ineradicable instinct of these mountain people to be leary of all strangers and new-comers; so a quiet and persistent watch was kept on the Rev. Woods.

Canary was only a little waif about five years of age when she and her reverend ancestor quietly rode down the peaceful Plum Valley late one September afternoon on a dilapidated and sorry-looking specimen of a brindle and peepless Western pony, and applied for lodging at the hillside log cabin of the Badd family. As hospitality is an unfailing trait of these simple and honest mountaineers, the travelers were bidden to “’light and rest their saddle,” and to “come right in and have a bite to eat and a sip o’ cider.”

CHAPTER II.

GETTING SETTLED.

The next morning the reverend gentleman told his host that he liked the looks of the country thereabouts, and expressed his intention of remaining and becoming one of them. The elder Mr. Badd “’lowed the neighborhood needed a man o’ God powerful bad,

as no circuit-rider had visited them for nigh onto foh' year, and their morals were not what they ought to be."

The news soon spread all over the Roaring Winds naborhood, and with the help of the nabors it was only a short while until the Rev. Woods and his pretty and fascinating little dauter were very comfortably domiciled in a modest little two-room log cabin down at the edge of Plum Valley and near the forks of Jumping Creek—a wild and restless little mountain streamlet that came tumbling down from the wooded hills and fought its way among the rocks and fallen trees, and thus the name—Jumping Creek. Their cabin was located in a beautiful and picturesque spot that was well calculated to appeal to the "*Call of the Wild*" in any nature—and Canary had an abundance of this "*Call of the Wild*" in her make-up.

The following winter the hardy mountaineers built a ruff log church, which was also utilized on week-days for a school-house. Here the Rev. Mr. Woods preached *Sarahvation* to the unrepentant on Sundays, and taught school on week-days—to the few country lads who could be inveigled into the school-house for that laudable purpose; however, the most of them would rather go hunting or fishing than attend school; but after the ruff lads got a glimpse of Canary, it was wonderful what an appetite for "larnin'" they developed, and the keen rivalry among them to curry favor with Canary. As the Badds were the first ones to take in this little elf and her distinguished father and befriend them, it was only natural that Kut would have the inside track and quite a start of the other boys. At the time the Woods came to the Roaring Winds naborhood Kut was a little past eleven years old, but mighty big and powerful for a lad of his years. As Canary was only a little tot, not quite six yet, Kut did not shy at her, as was his usual habit when calico was flaunted in his shy and awkward face; so the little girl grew right into his big ruff heart, as it were. It at once became apparent that Kut was destined to become Canary's *Prince Charming*. Of cburse, the other boys were more or less jealous of Kut, and one day, after school had been dismissed, a big raw-souled Irish boy, who was a year older than Kut, insisted on walking home with Canary, as her father had to remain at the school-house for an hour or so to prepare some lessons for the morrow; to this the child objected, and told him to go on about his business and let her alone; but as Pat had more of the bully than the gentleman in his make-up, he felt very sore over being so flatly and firmly repulsed, and

wanted revenge on her—so he at once began to snow-ball her so hard it made her cry. As it happened, Kut was absent from school that day and was not on hand to champion his little inamorata; however, he learned of it early next morning and was on hand in good time to settle accounts with Pat.

The pupils were all on hand when Patrick arrived, and had been duly informed of the episode of the evening before. "What are you going to do about it?" inquired Bud Hawkins; "for you know Pat Gorman is a year older than you are and can eat you alive!" "Sure thing!" chipped in Phil Mayo; "by the time Pat gets thru with Kut his face will be so *cut* up and bruised Canary won't care to look at him any more." These remarks and several more like them were enuff to cause Kut to make up his mind—even if he had not already done so. Fear was an element entirely unknown to Kutly Badd's nature, and it made no difference to him at all how much older or bigger his antagonist might be: it was a question where his honor and manhood were at stake. As soon as Patrick arrived, Kut pulled off his coat and walked up to him and quietly asked:

"Pat, why did you insult and hurt Canary last night?"

"Coz I wanted to, you big duffer—an' what yer goin' to do about it?"

"Whack! biff! bang!—that's what I'm going to do about it!" and before Pat knew what had hit him Kut was on top of him and they were both grappled in a life-and-death struggle for the mastery. It was nip and tuck for about five minutes, and then Kut wrenched his right arm free from Pat's death-grip and dealt his antagonist such a right-hand swing on the chin it put the Irishman over on Sleepy Island, where he remained for nearly an hour. With the assistance of the teacher and several of his pals, he was finally revived and sent home for the day; but he could never again be prevailed upon to attend the school while Kut Badd was there.

It was quite evident that Canary was much brighter mentally than any of the children of the naborhood, and when this fact finally dawned on Kut it fired him with a new zeal to get a good education so he might be more worthy of his little sweetheart.

After the fight at the school, Canary felt very proud of her champion, and a warm friendship endured between them that soon developed into real love on both sides. "I'm so glad you whipped that nasty ol' boy, Kut," whispered Canary to him one evening a week later when the two were lazily strolling home together and

playing hands like old-timers. "You won't ever let any of them hurt me—will you, Kut?" and she gave him a look that lassoed his soul with a *rainbow*. "They'd better not try it unless they can lick me!" and their hands gripped tighter than ever.

CHAPTER III.

THE MINISTER'S MYSTERIOUS CALLER.

After about two years of the Rev. Wood's ministry, he received a ruff and uncouth caller late one Friday evening, who requested the dominie to accompany him to administer to the last wants of a man who "was slipping his cable and preparing to bump the bumps."

"Where is your friend, my good man?" the reverend inquired.

"Not far from here—erbout foh' mile from here, over on Misty Mountain," rejoined the stranger.

"All right, my friend; lead on and I will lend your sick comrade any assistance within my power."

After a long and devious path, they finally arrived at a little hut well hidden away far up on the side of Misty Mountain—a place that would indeed be hard to find unless one had a guide. The stranger at once pushed the cabin door open with the muzzle of his rifle, after giving a peculiar whistle that was a cross between a whippoorwill's call and the "Bob White" of a native quail.

"Come right in, brother!" piped a thin and nervous voice from an inner apartment, which served as a sleeping- and living-room combined and which was separated from the outer room by some tanned skins and blankets. The outer room served as a kitchen and storage-room, for it contained all sorts of implements and groceries. "I am real glad to see you, sir," continued the voice, and at the same time held out a thin and hairy hand to the minister, which the latter warmly grasped and held for a minute, while the two men gazed steadily into each other's eyes.

"I am glad to meet you, my poor sick brother, but sorry to find you in this condition," returned the Rev. Woods.

"I have never had the pleasure of hearing you preach, and no doubt I need to, but somehow or other I have always put off going till now—and *now* it's too late. I have a short story to relate and then I want you to do me a favor if you will; but before I begin I desire that we be entirely *alone*, for I have some things to say that are only for your ears."

"All right, Sam," said the stranger, and he immediately got up

and with his rifle in his hand walked out and sauntered off down the mountain side.

After they were alone, the sick man began: "Brother Woods, I expect a man in your calling is used to receiving confidences and is supposed to keep them inviolate?"

"Yes, brother, we often receive confidences and death-bed confessions, and I have never violated a confidence reposed in me by a dying man," calmly and reassuringly returned the man of God.

"Well, then, about two weeks ago the boys got on a little bender over at the Still, and I got a bullet thru my bowels as a souvenir of the occasion. As there are no doctors within reach of this lonely spot, I have had to trust to luck to pull thru without them; but I now realize that I only have a few hours left me in this world, and while I know you can do nothing for me, I want you to write a letter for me to my wife and little ones back in Ol' Varginny. I had to leave that State a short while ago on account of the Revenoos, and they are watching my family and kindred so closely I have not dared to communicate with them; besides, I can neither read nor write, nor can any of the men I know here—the moonshiners in these hills. Over in Ol' Varginny I killed two of the cussed houn's, but I had to do it in self-defense; so, you see, if they had ever caught me, I would have to dance at the end of a rope—and bein' somewhat religious, I never did believe much in dancin'."

Then Sam halted for breath, for he was growing very weak. He confessed all his sins and told where the Still was located and gave the names of all the men connected with it, and then dictated a short letter to his wife and children back in Virginia. After the minister had written and sealed the letter and promised to mail it, and had sworn to never reveal what the moonshiner had told him, Sam held out his hand and bade the minister good-bye. Then he reached under his bunk and pulled out a leather wallet containing about \$300; this he handed to the minister, and told him to pay himself out of it for the visit and then forward the rest of it to his wife. Soon after the minister had the wallet in his pocket the stranger emitted that same peculiar whistle he had used on bringing the preacher to the cabin. He was bidden to enter, and then Sam said to him:

"Pete, I want you to escort our good brother here back to where he can find his way home, and then I want you to round up some of the boys and come back here and plant me in the side of the mountain."

"All right, pard; your wishes shall be respected." And then Pete and the minister took their leave of Sam; but they hadn't got twenty feet away from the cabin when a pistol-shot reverberated on the night air. They rushed back, and found that the moonshiner had concluded not to await a slow and torturing death from his wounds, but had pushed himself over the BRINK of the PROBABLY.

CHAPTER IV.

A MIDNIGHT RAID ON THE STILL.

About six months after the death of Sam, the Revenues made a raid on the Still with which Sam had been connected, but the birds had received a tip in some mysterious way, and were far away when the officers found and destroyed the *Glory-Juice Plant*. There were many and diverse opinions in the naborhood as to how the hated Revenues got their information—but, of course, nobody except one man really knew—and it is to be presumed that *he* was not talking for publication.

A WEDDING PARTY OVER ON TURKEY RIDGE.

About a year after the raid on the moonshiners' Still, a very happy and flustered young man appeared at the parsonage and in an awkward and embarrassed way asked the *Soul-Chaser* if he would go with him over on Turkey Ridge and splice a couple of young hearts that "wor jest a-dyin' uv love o' one anuther."

"Sure I'll go, my boy, for it is right in line with my work to help make people happy."

After a long and winding ride of about 15 miles, they at last came to a little log cabin that sat back in a small clearing of hazel brush and scrub oaks. "'Light, parson, and come right in," stammered the young man. On entering the parson found a beautiful and blushing slip of a young girl about sixteen and a sad-looking young-old woman about thirty-five—the girl's mother.

"Where is the bridegroom?" asked the parson in some astonishment, for he saw no evidence of a man about the place.

"Oh!" blushed the young man who had conducted him thither, "I guess I be ther lucky devil, parson; so perceed and let's have it over with as soon as possible."

The splicing was brief and satisfactory to all parties concerned, and then a tall and fierce-looking man appeared from out the Great Nowhere, it seemed. He bowed rather gingerly and coolly to the man of God, and then announced that *he* was to act as the min-

ister's guide and convoy back home. As the shades of night had already fallen, they at once set out for the parson's home—but, strange to relate, the parson *never* reached his home, and his dauter and nabors never heard of him again. It just seemed that the earth had opened up and swallowed him—*religion* and all.

Canary, who was then about nine years old, went over to live with the Badd family—which consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Badd, Kut, two brothers and a little sister who was a cripple. It seemed as tho the whole Badd family were very much attached to Canary and did all in their power to make the little waif and orphan happy and contented. Of course, the child was very disconsolate over the sudden and mysterious disappearance of her "Daddy," as she fondly called him. She could not understand *why* everyone was so sure he was dead and would never return. For a long time the poor child clung to the belief that he had lost his way in the hills and would soon return to her. Canary was the only one who believed that way, and the nabors would often remark (when she could not hear them) that the reverend soul-saver had very thotlessly exchanged the information he received from Sam with the execrated Revenues for a pot of mazuma—his "*thirty pieces of silver.*"

CHAPTER V.

KUT AND CANARY GROW UP TOGETHER.

After the mysterious disappearance of the reverend soul-chaser, Canary and Kut were inseparable companions, and during the few winter months they attended the sessions at the old log school-house together, and all thru the summer evenings they pursued their studies together out in the shade of the old apple trees on the Badd homestead.

Kut worked hard and saved every penny he could spare for buying books, clothes, etc. To a small county-seat town about 25 miles distant he would go twice a year to buy books and supplies and find a market for their surplus horses, cattle, hogs, chickens and other farm products. On one of these trips to the county-seat Kut met two young and fine-looking fellows who had just started a bank in the town—the first bank the town ever had. The horse-buyer who purchased a span of young mules from Kut gave the boy a check on the bank in payment for the animals. This was the mountaineer's first experience with banks and checks. The bankers asked him what he intended to do with the \$300 he had just received for his mules, and Kut replied that he was saving it

up to get married on. They very kindly told how risky it was to keep so much money around the house and painted in vivid colors the danger of keeping money around the house, etc. "Why not deposit it here in our bank, where it will be safe, and receive interest on it besides? Then when you need any money you can write a check for the amount." This seemed good to the unsophisticated mountaineer, and he left the major part of the \$300 with the kind and suave banker, *Mr. Ralph Brinkley*, and his brother-partner, *Mr. Glen Brinkley*. After making a few purchases, he returned home whistling and singing some of the old love-tunes current in his native hills. He was fondly dreaming of Canary and counting up the time until she would be old enuff to become *Mrs. Kutly Deep Badd*—how big and sweet it sounded when strung together in that fashion! and then to think that she would be *all his forever*—and he would ever be her devoted *lover-husband*. The human mind has ever enjoyed counting its chickens before they're hatched. Kut not only needed money to marry on, but it had ever been his ambition to save up enuff to pay off the mortgage on the old place and to provide for his parents in their sunset days. A laudable ambition, to be sure. The following May Kut had considerable live-stock and other farm products he wished to convert into dollars. He had told Canary all about his other trip to the county-seat, and his meeting with the nice and courteous gentlemen at the bank, of his depositing his money with them, and showed her all the mysteries and intricacies of properly filling out a check and signing it; so on this trip Canary coaxed him into letting her accompany him, for, said she:

"I can ride horseback and help you drive the stock just as good as any man; besides, I'm dying to attend a theater and see all the pretty things that *Nell Hopkins* tells me they have at the county-seat. Kut dear, you know I've just never been nowhere!"

"All right, little sweetheart; you shall go with me, and we will stay all night and attend the theater and see all the sights and then come back in the evening, when the dear old moon will candle the way for us."

So it was settled that Canary should accompany him with the stock next week. After Kut had sold his stock and produce, he and Canary went to the bank to deposit the money they would not need for their immediate needs. *Mr. Ralph Brinkley* was alone in the bank when Kut and Canary arrived, and on recognizing Kut his face broke into a sweet and cordial smile as he reached his hand

thru the "Teller's Window" and warmly grasped and shook Kut's big tanned paw.

Kut did not offer to introduce Canary, but after he had concluded his business, Mr. Brinkley asked tentatively: "Is this your little sister, Mr. Badd?"

Kut was greatly embarrassed, and after blushing furiously and floundering around for a few seconds, stammered out: "No, she ain't my *sister*—she—she is—is—*Miss Canary Woods*, the minister's dauter."

"Ah! Miss Woods, I'm delighted to meet you," smiled Brinkley, and he made her a profound bow and came from behind the railing to shake hands with her. "Is this your first visit to our little city?"

He was evidently very much taken with the "minister's dauter," as Kut had very diplomatically introduced her; but Canary was very much embarrassed by his extreme suavity and attentions, and at once started for the door, remarking to Kut that she wanted to go over to the big store and see the pretty new hats; whereupon Kut bade the banker good-day and followed his little love up the street.

"I don't like that man," pouted Canary.

"Why not?" asked Kut in real surprise; "he seems awfully nice and polite."

"I don't know *why*—only I *don't* like him."

CHAPTER VI.

KUT THRASHES THREE "BAD MEN" FROM BEAR TRACK GULCH AND LOSES BOTH HIS PARENTS.

Kut and Canary worked hard on the old homestead and in the evenings, on Sundays and rainy days they diligently pursued their studies together; so in a few years they both had acquired quite a good education—especially from the standpoint of the Roaring Winds naborhood. Canary's rare and dainty beauty and innate loveliness increased with the years—much to her lover's pride and delight; but such a bright and shining light would naturally attract other insects; therefore Kut had many rivals to outwit and vanquish.

At a dance given by one of Kut's nabors, three "*Bad Men*" from over in the Bear Track Gulch diggings invited themselves to attend and participate in the festivities. They had evidently visited some Still before coming to the hoedown, for when they arrived at Mr. Howard's their condition was at once apparent to every-

one except themselves. The biggest and boldest of the three pushed his way in and swaggered out on the floor and attempted to take Canary away from Kut, with whom she was then waltzing. No, Kut didn't do a thing to him and his two companions, who staggered to their pal's assistance; at least, you wouldn't think he did if you could have seen their faces and eyes the next morning. They had the appearance of having played an engagement with a bunch of bob-cats, a saw-mill, a cyclone and a hay-baler. They looked like a bunch of Y. M. C. A. rookies on a ferryboat who had tried to sail across No Man's Land in a Ford. After this little episode, the other swains gave Canary a wide berth—especially when Kut was around.

Kut continued to make semi-annual trips to the county-seat, and Canary often accompanied him, but she would never be prevailed upon to enter the bank again. After a few years more, Kut's bank account had reached quite respectable proportions, and Canary had arrived at her *eighteenth* birthday—the time set for her marriage with Kut. On their next trip to the county-seat in the early part of December they went over to the County Judge's office in the court-house and were quietly united in marriage. They concluded to remain in town for a few days to make the purchases for their new home and a few Christmas presents for the family and relatives back in the hills. On the preceding day they got in town so late in the afternoon with their stock that by the time it was disposed of the bank had closed for the day, and as it was Saturday, Kut and his bride had concluded to remain over till Monday or Tuesday; so he gave the bank no further attention—especially as he had about \$20 in cash on his person, which would be plenty for their immediate needs; besides, he was too absorbingly happy to think of anything but his blessed little wife. Can we blame him?

A BANK FAILURE—HELL'S TO PAY.

On the following Monday morning, when Kut went around to the bank, he found a wild and highly excited crowd surging around its doors and completely filling the interior—where the bookkeeper wildly tried to make the citizens understand that the Messrs. Brinkley had not shown up, and that when he unlocked and started to open up and lay the cash out in its proper drawers, he discovered there was no cash to lay out—except a few dollars in nickels and pennies. He had no idea what had become of it, for the doors had not been tampered with, and everything seemed in order.

At Saturday noon Mr. Glen Brinkley left town to visit an aunt

in a near-by town, and would return on the noon train Monday. Mr. Ralph Brinkley had locked up on Saturday at about 4.30 p. m. and went to the barber-shop to get a shave, as usual, and then started for his rooms, which were located in a private home on the outskirts of the town. The family where he roomed were all up town that evening and did not return till after 9 o'clock that night, but did not trouble themselves to ascertain whether their roomer was in his apartments or not; anyway, he was not definitely missed until about noon the next day, when his landlady went up to clean up his rooms, and then she discovered that he had not slept in his bed Saturday night. His belongings, except a handbag and a suitcase, were there; but he never returned, and the blame was soon laid at his door. His brother Glen returned on the noon train Monday, as expected, and he was prostrated on learning that his rascally brother Ralph had looted the bank and "23d" himself into the Great and Vast SOMEWHERE. It did not take the people long to satisfy themselves that Glen had nothing whatever to do with the episode. Poor Kut and Canary were sure enuff up against it, for every dollar they owned (except about \$20 they had with them) was in the bank—"where it would be safe and at interest!"

Nothing left to start housekeeping on—no chance now to save the old homestead. What would become of the Old Folks in their evening-time? The shock was so great it killed Kut's mother in less than a week, and the old man (thru grief of it and the loss of his lifelong mate) soon followed her to that Dark and Mysterious Night that has no morning at the other end of it.

CHAPTER VII.

KUT GOES WEST.

About a week after the bank failure, Kut left his beloved little Canary with relatives and cut out for the Great and Boundless West, to try his luck in that wonder-place of Hope and Possibility. After selling to a nabor the little stock he had left, he gave Canary \$150 and had \$50 left for himself. He bought a ticket to St. Louis, and after roaming around in that smoky and gloomy town for a few days, he went to Des Moines, Iowa, where he arrived the following day. After resting up a bit, he commenced to roam around the town in hopes he might run across Ralph Brinkley—but no such good luck. He met a rich farmer and cattle-breeder who lived in northern Iowa. Kut and the farmer both liked each other at first sight, and it was not long until Kut had "hired out" to the farmer for the season, and

soon they were speeding away to the farmer's home; but the train that bore them thither was wrecked a few miles from the farmer's home, and he and Kut both sustained rather severe injuries. The farmer emerged with only a broken arm, but poor Kut was not so fortunate. His skull was badly injured and his right leg broken. When they got him out he was still unconscious, but not dead. The old farmer had him carried to his home and summoned his family physician, who, after an examination of the skull, said he would never regain consciousness until the skull was trepanned and the pressure on the delicate brain substance removed. Two other surgeons were called in, and after setting his leg, they operated on his skull—but no signs of returning consciousness appeared, and he lingered in a semi-comatose condition for several weeks, and then came back and rapidly got well. Kut was soon able to go to work, and he worked with such vim and vigor that the old farmer often cautioned him to not overdo himself.

Kut had not told the farmer anything about himself nor where he was from, and there was not a thing on him nor in his scanty baggage that gave any clue as to where his people might live, and so forth. He at once wrote his wife a long account of his accident, and told her to cheer up and everything would come out all right in the end. The farmer paid his doctor bills, and said Kut might pay it back in work, but he refused to accept anything for board; so Kut need not worry about the future. The doctor bills left Kut about \$100 in debt to the farmer, but he could soon square that up.

The latter part of August and the first of September the great Iowa State Fair is held every year in the city of Des Moines, and it is always attended by people from all parts of the State and from many naboring States. The farmer had some mighty fine cattle, hogs, horses and sheep which he wanted to exhibit at the great fair, and informed Kut that he wanted him to go along and help with the animals. This just suited the young mountaineer, for he thot that at such a wide and diverse gathering of people he might possibly get a glimpse of a certain renegade Kentuckian whom he longed to see—for just a minute, and then—well, as the reader can easily guess the rest of it, I shall not waste time and space relating it.

KUT PLAYS THE BANG-TAILS AND MAKES GOOD.

Kut, *like all mountaineers and true Kentuckians*, loved "hoss flesh" next to his wife; so the races proved a source of great in-

terest and joy to him—and also to his employer, for the old farmer always accompanied Kut to the race-track. Kut's knowledge of fine horses, and especially race horses, was second to none; so he did not hesitate to back his choice; but, unfortunately, he suddenly remembered that he only had about \$8 out of the \$10 he had left when he wrote to Canary. This he bet on a little sorrel mare and won—much to his delight and the farmer's disapproval, for the latter did not believe in gambling in any form. He put his whole \$16 and \$4 more he borrowed from his employer on a rather sorry-looking nag at odds of 3 to 1—and again was successful. This gave him a capital of \$56—after paying the farmer the \$4 he had just borrowed. He was in high spirits the remainder of the day, and as soon as he could get to the track next day he bet his \$56 on the ponies, and again his judgment was right. This gave him \$112 for his next bet, which he also won. This easy way of making money by simply picking the right nag and having the courage to back your choice with the mazuma so excited and rattled the old farmer that he decided to take a small flyer himself, which he did to the munificent extent of \$5—and *lost*. The farmer was now absolutely certain that gambling was a grievous sin. Kut put up even \$200 on the next and last race of the day, against the groans and protests of his employer, and as before the Fickle Goddess was on his side. This left the lad over \$400 in spot cash. The next day the farmer argued that his luck would turn, and admonished him not to bet any more; but the fever was in his blood and he again risked \$400 on the nag that nearly everyone was betting against. Again he was lucky, and now repaid the farmer the \$100 he owed him on his doctor bills. On that afternoon the big race of the week was scheduled to take place, and Kut coolly placed \$700 on his pick of the flyers—and won easily. He helped the farmer home with his cattle and horses and then told him that farming was too slow and had no further attractions for him. The next day he left for St. Paul, Minnesota, and intended to go on from there into the Great Northwest.

“By gum, mother, if I could pick the runners like that big chap can, I wouldn't farm another lick—so I wouldn't!” exclaimed the farmer to his wife that night at supper.

“Why, Abner Blake! you had orto be ashamed o' yourself! And you a deacon, too!”

While in St. Paul, Kut received a letter from Kentucky that

froze up hie last drop of blood, and he at once started for Windy City—Chicugo—

CHAPTER VIII.

KUT MEETS A FELLOW-KENTUCKIAN ON THE TRAIN.

The letter Kut received from Kentucky stated that his wife had left there about two months ago to meet him in Chicago—where the telegram stated he was dying from the effects of injuries received in a train wreck near Chicago. This sad intelligence was certainly enuff to congeal anyone's gore.

He bought a paper from a train-butcher and tried to interest himself in its contents of crime and tragedies, but his mind was so wholly engrossed with the problem of his wife's trip to Chicago to meet him, when he lay unconscious away out in Iowa and had sent her no message of any kind, nor had he ever spoken of his family to anyone since leaving his native hills in pursuit of Fortune and the undying hope that he might find the scoundrel Brinkley and even up accounts with the degenerate. He soon tossed the paper to an elderly man across the aisle from himself. The gentleman had the unmistakable air of the mountains and of the South, and politely and tentatively asked Kut if he were not a Kentuckian.

"Why, to be sure I am," cordially returned Kut, glad of an opportunity to have someone to talk to; "but are you from the same State?"

"I am from Blankville—over in the eastern part of the State."

"How strange!" smiled Kut; "for I am from the same part of the old State, and I often went over to the county-seat to sell stock and do shopping. My name is Kut Badd, and I was raised over in the Roaring Winds naborhood."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Colonel Bangs; "then I can tell you some mighty interesting news, I reckon. Aren't you the chap that married Canary Woods about three or four months ago?"

"I am," quietly said Kut, and his heart was in his throat and he was getting so nervous he could hardly control his emotions; "and I am now on my way to Chicago to find her if it is possible, for I have just received a letter from my people telling me that she had been summoned there to meet me, and that I was dying from injuries received in a train wreck."

"Poor boy!" kindly and pathetically sighed the Colonel; "then your trip to Chicago will be in vain, for you will never see your wife again!"

"What do you mean? Speak, man! Speak!" and the poor lad jumped in the air and his face was white and hard.

"Calm yourself, my boy, and try to get control of your nerves, for *she is dead!*"

And then Colonel Kensington Bangs told Kut the whole sad story as he received it from the lips of his dying daughter in a hospital in Minneapolis. When Brinkley fled from Blankville with the funds his pious and trusting neighbors had entrusted to his "safe keeping," he did not go alone. He added another crime to his somber record by eloping with the Colonel's married daughter and shortly afterward selling her to the White Slavers in Chicago. He soon tired of her charms when said charms were all his own and something of an expense to him. While living with her, he had confided to her when intoxicated that he loved Canary Badd and intended to have her, if he had to "kill her Rube of a husband and wade thru Hell to get her!"

In some unaccountable way, Brinkley had learned of the wreck in which Kut had been so inopportunistically rendered unconscious, where he was and all about it; so, when the fiend learned that Kut would be "out of the world" for a long time, and possibly forever, he at once set about to entice Canary to Chicago, where he could forcibly keep her and compel her to do his bidding. Luck often favors the wicked, it seems, for on the next day after Kut had received his injuries Brinkley was on an incoming train from the Northwest and nearing Chicago, when a defective rail ditched the train and caused a horrible catastrophe. Many of the passengers of this ill-fated train were killed and many others were more or less injured. Brinkley escaped without so much as a scratch, while many good and worthy people were killed or horribly mangled. Among the badly injured and unconscious ones was a large and angular young man who could easily have passed for Kut's twin brother. When he was searched, it was found that his skull was badly crushed, but still he lived. His clothing and cheap handbag found near him bore no trace of a name or address. Brinkley was one of the parties who helped to dig him out from under the debris and helped search him for something to identify the man, and when Brinkley learned that there were no marks nor cards to identify the stranger, he suddenly remembered him as an old school-mate of his whom he had not seen for many years; so he identified him as Kutly D. Badd, of Blankville, Kentucky. From that on Brinkley took great interest in the unconscious stranger and had him trans-

ferred to a city hospital, and at once sent the following telegram to Canary:

“CITY HOSPITAL, CHICAGO, Sept. 18, 18—.
“Mrs. Kut D. Badd, Blankville, Ky.

“Your husband hurt in railroad wreck—is dying. Come at once.
DR. S. O. FORTH.”

The telegram caused consternation among the simple hill folks back in Kentucky, and Canary left on the first train for Chicago. Brinkley was at the *Stopo* (new word for *depot*) with a closed carriage and had carefully disguised himself so she would not recognize him. He certainly looked like an elderly physician, and was so kind and fatherly to his victim that he at once won her confidence, and he assured her that he had every hope of being able to save her husband's life after they had performed the operation on his skull, which they intended to do to-morrow if the condition of the patient would permit. He told the poor scared and timid child that her husband was entirely unconscious, and that she could not see him until the following day—just before the *operation*; and in the meantime she could stay, if she liked, in the hospital annex where the nurses roomed, and in that way she would be near at hand in case they needed her. The innocent little victim never dreamed of her impending fate.

After quite a long and winding ride of about an hour, the carriage finally drew up in front of quite a big stone structure where the blinds were all closely drawn; but once inside, everything was elegantly and softly furnished, and Canary was met by the “*Head Nurse*” and conducted to a back room on the third floor. It is needless to say the house was a swell bagnio, and the “*Head Nurse*,” as Brinkley had told Canary she was, in reality was the *Landlady*.

The poor little bird soon discovered that her room was locked and no way for her to get out of it. After about a week of trying to force himself on Canary, Brinkley gave it up as a hopeless task and sold her to the *Landlady* for \$500, and then disappeared. After a few days of such a horrible life, and realizing that she could never escape, the poor girl killed herself to escape the infamy and horror of such a life that yawned before her.

The Colonel's dauter had' been an inmate of this Hell-on-Earth place for about two months, and had, by pretending to like it, so far won the confidence of the *Landlady* that she became a “trusty,” and for that reason had been assigned to help break-in

the new recruits and carry their food to them. When she found that Canary was from Kentucky, she took the girl into her confidence and explained everything to her, and the two planned to escape together. In this way she soon learned all about Canary and her husband, the plot by which the girl had been lured to Chicago, etc. They were both captured while trying to escape, and then, in a fit of hopeless despondency, Canary killed herself. Soon thereafter the Colonel's daughter escaped and fled to Minneapolis, where she died in a hospital shortly afterward. (*White slavery flourishes in all our big cities, and yet we are sending many "Missionaries" abroad to "convert the heathen to OUR Civilization."*)

CHAPTER IX.

KUT ROBS HIS FIRST BANK IN DAKOTA.

After learning the sad and tragic story of his wife's cruel betrayal and untimely death, Kut's whole nature turned to flint and only thoughts of finding Brinkley and taking some adequate revenge filled his mind; but how to find the renegade was the difficult part of the problem. Shooting the rotter after he had found him, or strangling the life out of his vile body, was a trifling matter. "Anyway, this universe is not half big enough to hold both of us!" declared Kut to Colonel Bangs as the two gentlemen parted on the train. After a few hours of hard thinking, Kut decided that it would be useless to continue on to Chicago; so when the train pulled into the quiet little German-American city of La Crosse, Wisconsin, Kut alighted and bought a ticket back to St. Apolis and Minne Paul. After a few days of outfitting and sight-seeing in the Mill City, and after providing himself with a pair of the latest and deadliest up-to-date revolvers and a high-power Winchester rifle of large caliber, a wicked-looking dagger and some necessary clothing and disguises, Kut started for the Great Northwest and for Montana in particular. He had a vague idea he would find his quarry in Montana.

As Brinkley had been a banker, Kut had a very poor opinion of that whole craft, and vowed vengeance on any of them that fell in his way. The little pile of money he had won on the races in Des Moines was rapidly doing the disappearing act, and Kut realized that he must speedily add to it if he intended to travel about seeking one of the lowest and most degenerate scoundrels that ever disgraced the earth by walking on it. Traveling around and paying out money every day, and none coming in, was a new problem to

the mountaineer, and as he must have plenty of it, in order to prosecute his search for Brinkley, he decided to "*borrow*" from Brinkley's own craft. He considered the banks his legitimate prey, and moreover, they would most readily yield cash and thus replenish his diminishing exchequer or "kick." "Yes, I'll try my hand on some bank in a small town in South Dakota," for he had observed in traveling thru that wild and woolly country that the banks seldom had more than two men in them, and he soon discovered that they took turns at going to dinner; so how easy it would be to drop in the bank during the noon hour, when only one clerk would be in charge, and demand the money; besides, nearly all the stores and near-by shops would also be closed at that hour, while their owners and clerks were at dinner. There would be slight chance of other customers coming in the bank at that hour.

"About as easy as taking candy from a baby," mused Kut to himself after he had the situation sized up and understood the customs in the small towns. It was all very clear to Kut that he could easily rob such a bank at the noon hour, and the only drawback to the plan was the "get-away" after the job was done; but, of course, he had to assume all the risks and take all the desperate chances, and might get captured or killed; but, as his life was now a blank and he had nothing to live for except the ignoble motive of revenge, what did it matter anyway? The only thing that prevented Kut from pushing himself over the Brink of the Probably and thus be done with it was the forlorn hope of finding Brinkley and killing him as he would a snake or skunk.

After about a week of aimlessly drifting from place to place in South Dakota, Kut arrived in a prosperous-looking little town of about 600 people and that had quite a nice-looking little bank; so he decided to pull off his first stunt in the bank-robbing line right there; but he must first study the surrounding country, time of all the trains in and out of town, how far across the country to an adjoining town with railway facilities, etc. "Preparedness," quoted Kut to himself, "is a mighty good motto most any time, and doubly so when one has a particular and ticklish job on hand; besides, I must have a first-class nag to aid me in my flight." At first he thot he would select the horse that suited him and then find where the owner lived and go there at night and steal the animal; but, as the farmers had never wronged Kut and were members of his own class and trade, he could not bring himself to the point of doing one of them a wrong; besides, he had plenty of

money to buy a good horse or two, and if the bank venture turned out as he expected, he would soon have plenty of money for his immediate needs. "And as I am a Kentuckian and a *gentleman*, I just can't get down low enough to make **war** on women and steal hosses; besides, I must keep my self-respect," mused Kut to himself. The second day after finding the nag he wanted Kut started out on foot to the farmer's place, and after about ten minutes' dickering, bought the animal for \$40 less than he expected to give. The old farmer was an old-fashioned Norwegian—one of those good and upright old souls who adhered to the *Golden Rule* as closely as possible. He invited Kut to take dinner with him and his family of wife, three sons and two dauters. Kut won the good-will of them all, and after dinner the old man explained to Kut that his eldest son was soon to marry and move to a place of his own, and that the youngest lad, a boy of sixteen, was going off to college in October, and this would leave only himself and his second son to run the farm, and as it was too much work for the two of them, he asked Kut to stay and work for him that year anyway, and longer if they all got along nicely together.

At dinner that day Kut could not help noticing that the farmer's eldest dauter gave him many a shy and admiring glance, and as she looked very pretty and fascinating to the lonesome mountaineer, he was secretly pleased, and on her account, more than for any other reason, Kut decided to accept the farmer's proposition. The terms of the deal were soon agreed to on both sides, and Kut was to keep his new horse there without charge for its keep; he was to have the use of the single buggy every other Sunday if he so desired.

Inside of a week Kut had won the confidence and good-will of the entire Dnajsen family and considerably more than the good-will of Valleja—the eldest dauter. The farmer lived about three miles from the little town whose bank he intended to rob, and he figured that if he were employed in the naborhood and thot well of, suspicion would pass him by when he pulled off the bank stunt, which he fully intended to do a little later on. Kut considered it wise to lie low for a few weeks and thus carefully arrange all his plans, so there would be no misstep when the critical moment came. He didn't overlook anything, and as he now had a fine and speedy nag of his own, he could skylark around on Sundays and study the lay of the land, railways, etc. On some of these look-around trips he hitched his horse to the old farmer's buggy and took Valleja

with him—"just for company" was the way he explained it to himself. He pitched in and worked hard with a vigorous stroke, and was so careful and economical with the farmer's horses, tools, etc., he rapidly rose in the estimation of the entire family and was well liked by the few nabors he met in the course of naborly intercourse.

After about six weeks' sojourn at the Norwegian's, Kut decided that the time was about ripe for his little deal at the bank; besides, an event was about to take place four miles east of the town that would greatly facilitate his plans. The Norwegian lived three miles west of the town, and Kut learned from the family that Mr. Frostbrook was to have a big sale of all his live-stock, farm implements and household goods on a certain Saturday in the near future. The farmer and his sons were going, and remarked that the whole country round about would be there, as well as half the town, for Mr. Frostbrook had announced that there would be plenty to drink and eat—and all free to those who attended his sale; so this would surely attract a large crowd—whether they wanted to buy anything or not. Colonel Bellow Windstorm was to cry the sale, and his unfailing humor and touching eloquence and matchless oratory were a source of joy to all who ever heard his remarkable voice. The cashier of the bank was to clerk the sale, for he knew the financial standing of everyone in the county and in adjoining counties and naboring towns.

Kut listened indifferently to all this gossip about the sale, and apparently paid no attention to it, and when the farmer invited him to leave off work for that day and accompany them to the sale, Kut declined on the ground that he knew nobody, and on that account it would be rather uninteresting and a loss of time; besides, there was a piece of plowing he wanted to finish by Monday noon if possible; so he "reckoned he'd stay at home and work all day." It did not take Kut long to see that the day of the sale would be the very time for his little stunt at the bank. Most of the men-folks of the village would be out at the sale, where there would be "plenty to eat and drink"; besides, the cashier was to clerk the sale, and that would only leave one clerk in charge of the bank—a mere boy of eighteen, who acted as bookkeeper, assistant cashier and all-around factotum. His position in the bank was due mainly to the influence of his uncle—one of the principal stockholders in the bank. Another thing that had decided Kut to raid the bank was the fact that the old Norwegian had lost several thousands a few years ago in a bank failure. Since that bitter experience the old

farmer had kept his little savings secreted about the house and barn. When Kut learned that the old farmer had no money in the bank, that fact greatly relieved his mind, for he had grown quite fond of the old farmer and his entire family, and it worried Kut very much to have to rob his good friend and employer.

On the day of the sale Kut went to the field to plow, as he had been doing for a few days back, and this "eighty" he was plowing was quite a distance from the house and was separated from the old homestead by an adjoining "eighty"; this brought Kut within about two miles of the town. About half-past 11 he quietly tied up his team to a stake in the ground and slipped away to the town on foot, and so well disguised that no one would recognize him if he should be met by any of the nabors or citizens of the town. He only met one person on the way to the bank, and that was a school-girl about fourteen years of age. He arrived at the bank about 5 minutes of 12, and found the young clerk in charge and just preparing to close up for dinner. Kut had a large bill (\$50) he wanted changed. This necessitated the unlocking of the safe, and just as the clerk emerged from the vault with his hands full of bills, he found himself looking into the nozzle of a big and business-looking 6-talker, and a hard and terrible voice behind it and commanding the clerk to keep quiet and hand out all the money and be "damned quick about it, too!" The clerk had an extensive streak of yellow in him and he at once threw up his hands and completely collapsed, and sinking down on his knees, began to pray and implore the robber not to shoot him. Kut was so disgusted with his utter lack of courage that he whacked him a hard clip over the head with his revolver, and thus put the boob down and out for awhile. Kut immediately locked the front door, pulled down the blinds and arranged the "Gone to Dinner" sign in the door, and then he returned to the unconscious cashier and chucked him into the vault—after extracting all the money, locked the vault door and quickly tucked the money away in two big belts he wore underneath his clothes, and then he peered carefully out of the front door and saw that the town looked like a deserted village; then he quietly let himself out the back door, and after passing out into the alley, he was soon beyond the town on his way back to the field. He quickly counted his treasure, and it totaled up \$18,734 and a little odd change. He hurriedly buried it and carefully marked the place so he would have no trouble finding it when he was ready to "pull his freight."

Kut then went back to where he had left his team; he untied them and proceeded to plow around to the point nearest the house, when he took his jug and went to the house to refill it with water. That kind of a job was enuff to make almost anyone a little dry around the gills. At the well he met Valleja, who was more than glad to see him and tried to detain him for a friendly chat. Valleja's mother, hearing her daughter talking with someone, looked out the door to see who it was; but on recognizing that it was Kut, she immediately went back to her sewing and paid no further attention to them, for she was set on acquiring Kut for a son-in-law, and therefore gave them every opportunity to "spark" one another. Kut's real object in going to the house at that time was to be *seen* and *recognized*, so that he could prove that he had not been off the farm that day. He only chatted with the girl about ten minutes, and then returned to his plowing and continued faithfully at it till quite late—almost sundown, when he returned home riding one of his three horses and leading the other two. When he reached the house, the old farmer and his son had just returned from the sale, and they at once informed Kut of the bank robbery and said that posses had already formed and were searching for the robbers, who, the frightened cashier averred, "were two big giants fully 7 feet tall and weighed about 300 each, and looked to be about forty-five years old." This description would certainly let Kut out if he were ever suspected; however, no suspicion ever attached to Kut, and after a fruitless search and the arrest and release of about forty persons suspected of the crime, the thing blew over and became history. The bankers had less than \$400 in the bank of their *own* money—nearly all of it belonging to their depositors; therefore they did not feel the robbery very much. They seldom do.

It was a lucky thing for the president and cashier that they were both out to the sale that day, for they might have been suspected *themselves* of doing the job. This little episode made the old farmer more leary than ever of banks, and he rejoiced greatly that his money was all safe and where he could put his hands on it when he wanted it.

That night at supper they all discussed the bank robbery, but no one could imagine who did it. The people in town finally decided it was done by professionals from St. Paul, and that it would be impossible to ever find them.

"I bane so glad, paw, that our money him bane not in that bank!" exclaimed the old lady as she heaved a big sigh of relief;

and that seemed to be the consensus of opinion in the Norwegian household; and Valleja looked over at Kut and caressed him with her soft brown eyes, and thot to herself that if the big mountaineer were only her own, she wouldn't care whether there was a blamed bank in all the world. Kut liked Valleja and was awfully nice to her, but he had only a broken and tattered heart to offer, and was too honest and manly to make such a mock offering; besides, he had a *mission* to fulfill, and that took precedence over everything else. He could never settle down and be at peace with himself until he had found Brinkley and avenged his wife's death; then he didn't care much what happened.

CHAPTER X.

KUT JOINS A BARN-STORMING COMPANY AND BECOMES AN ACTOR.

Kut now had plenty of means to prosecute his search for the erstwhile Brinkley, but he well knew it would not look just right for him to pull out so soon after the bank robbery; so he decided it would be best to wait a reasonable time, so that suspicion might not possibly attach to him; therefore he remained with the old farmer six months, and in the meantime had become more sociable by mingling with the people of the town and naborhood, and had become quite popular with all he met. The old farmer spoke of him in such flattering terms that he had many offers to work for other farmers, and the president of the bank wanted Kut to act as foreman for a large ranch he owned in a near-by county, and on which he employed twenty-two men; but this flattering offer was declined, on the ground that, as Kut had been raised in the South, he did not like the severe winters of the Dakotas—the preceding one being his first winter in the far North. "I intend to take a trip to the great State of Texas and see how I like things down there," he explained to his nabors.

On his way to St. Paul he had to change cars at a small town in western Minnesota, and had to wait over from 5 o'clock that afternoon till 10.40 the next day.

"Some wait!" mused Kut to himself. He went to the only hotel the little town afforded and secured lodgings for the night. The town was about 880 in population and a small theatrical troupe was holding forth at the "opera-house" of the town, and they were what is generally known in the West as "barn-stormers." Kut had not been in the hotel office long until one of the actors guessed from

his soft way of pronouncing his *rs* that he was a Southerner, and at once introduced himself as a native of Kentucky, and when Kut told him that he also hailed from that grand old State of bluegrass, good horses and fine whisky, the two soon got well acquainted and were good friends. Kut was soon introduced to the entire company—three women, four men and three *dogs*. The week before one of the actors had met with a severe accident and had to be left behind until he recovered from a broken leg and other severe injuries; therefore the company was “shy” a man and greatly in need of one to take his place. It is a hard matter to pick up “talent” out in the small towns—even for a barn-storming outfit. This actor friend of Kut’s asked the mountaineer how he would like to be an actor.

“Well, I hardly know,” replied Kut; “I might learn it in the course of time, I reckon?” and he looked at the actor with an interrogation point in each eye.

“Just the thing!” enthusiastically exclaimed Mr. Van Duysen Storm, the actor; “and I just feel sure we can soon make a first-class actor out of you; besides, we particularly want a big and husky fellow who can play the bandit roles in ‘THE JAMES BOYS IN MISSOURI’ and other Wild Western dramas,” and he clasped Kut’s hand eagerly.

“All right, pard; if you all think I can make good at it, I’d just as soon give it a whirl as not; especially as I have nothing particular on hand at present,” assented Kut.

The manager and Mr. Storm invited Kut to go along with them to the show that night, and assured him that they would initiate him into the mysteries of the game as enacted behind the scenes. Kut was taken to the dressing-room of Mr. Storm and two other actors who shared the same dressing-room, for dressing-rooms are very scarce in the “opera-houses” of the small towns. The said “opera-houses” often consisted of an ordinary hall or vacant store-room about 30 feet wide and 70 feet long, with a very crude stage erected at the rear end of it and curtained off the best they could. This was the first time Kut had ever met any real “show people,” as they are called in the country towns, and it was the first time he had ever had a peep behind the scenes, but the thing that most interested and fascinated him was the skillful and wonderful way in which the actors and actresses could alter their appearance and make-up to represent different characters; and it was all done with grease-paints, wigs and a few other simple devices familiar to the theatrical craft. It was simply wonderful how a young man in the

early twenties could "make up" and look like an elderly man in the seventies, but most wonderful of all was the way a white man could "make up" and appear like a real darky and talk the negro dialect to perfection. They assured Kut that they could in a few weeks teach him the whole art of "make up" and disguising, and how to imitate different voices and nationalities.

On the next night they were to present a blood-curdling and thrilling Western drama entitled "THE JAMES BOYS IN MISSOURI." In this thrilling drama from real life they showed how the outlaws rob trains, banks, etc., and their running and desperate fights with the sheriffs and detectives; also, the cunning ruses they employ to outwit their pursuers and escape arrest and punishment. The actors soon discovered that Kut had plenty of grit and was very apt at imitating the negro dialect and character, and was expert with horses and in the use of firearms; therefore they decided to cast him in the role for the following night. Kut was to be one of the bandits to "hold-up" the engineer and express agent, and as he was very tall and angular, with steel-blue eyes that had a cold and merciless glitter in them when mad or excited, they decided to make him up as the famous *Frank James*—and he certainly did look the part after the last rehearsal, for they were adepts at the art of "making up" and disguising—even if they had earned the title of "barn-stormers."

The following night Kut acquitted himself with high honors and won several curtain-calls—much to his delight and the satisfaction of the management, for they foresaw that Kut would soon be a first-class actor; however, Kut had no intention of long remaining an actor—in fact, he had other and *bigger* fish to fry. He was quick to realize what a tremendous advantage it would be to him in his future work among the banks if he were an expert at "making up" and disguising himself; in fact, such a knowledge would be a valuable asset, and as he could acquire it in a few weeks, and at the same time be making at least his expenses, he decided to stick to the barn-stormers until he had learned all he wanted and needed to know in the "make up" line; and then he would drop out and take up his silent hunt for Brinkley in the State of Montana—and even in the remotest parts of *Hell*—until he found the degenerate and choked the life out of him. Kut was quick to learn the histrionic business and scored big hits every night, and it was only a short time until he could work the "make up" racket with the best of them. He also developed a wonderful talent for changing his voice and gait in walking—all valuable accomplishments for his future

work. After about seven weeks with the barn-stormers, he cut loose one Sunday morning, after receiving all his back salary. He told them he was engaged to marry a girl back in the old Bluegrass State and just could not put it off any longer.

Shortly after leaving the old Norwegian farmer, Kut sold his horse for \$50 more than he gave for it—not because he did not like the nag, for it was really a fine animal; but Kut foresaw that, as the horse was so well known in that naborhood, it might be the means of identifying him sometime when he was not longing for identification. “It doesn’t pay to overlook any bets—however small and insignificant they may *appear*,” thought Kut to himself. “The animal that doesn’t *always* keep an eye for *traps* is quite likely to blunder into one of the cussed things when and where he least expects it.”

One of the actors had been a railroad man for some time before he drifted into the show business. He had worked his way up from the very bottom to the top—from common section-hand and engine-wiper and hostler to machinist, fireman, engineer, brakeman, conductor, telegrapher, etc. He knew railroading from syntax to harvest, and had been let out and black-balled on account of the active part he took in a big strike some years previous. He soon found out what a complete and terrible thing a “black list” is, for no matter where he went and sought employment, he could not secure a job, altho he was a high-grade and efficient man and stood high in the various railway crafts. He had a cousin who was a successful actor, and thru this relative he was induced to try his hand at the theatrical profession—which he did, and with considerable success. It was from this ex-railroad man and present actor that Kut soon learned all about the ins and outs of the railroad business—how to run an engine and fire one; all the secret codes and signals of the business—how to stop a train, how to operate the air-brakes, etc.; so when Kut left the barn-stormers he was the proud and happy possessor of *two new professions*, both of which would be valuable in his new field of endeavor.

CHAPTER XI.

KUT PULLS OFF HIS FIRST TRAIN ROBBERY ALONE.

After squaring himself with the barn-stormers, Kut locked himself in his room and “took stock” of his earthly possessions. He had just \$19,767.64—quite a tidy little sum for his immediate needs.

Everything Kut tried his hands at turned out successfully in a financial way. After playing the part of the redoubtable Frank James for seven weeks with the barn-stormers, Kut felt so proud and confident of his abilities in this line that he longed to try a real train "hold-up." When he left the show he found himself in eastern Minnesota. He boarded a fast express train for Minneapolis, and from the Flour City he intended going direct to Montana and taking up his still hunt for Brinkley. "I don't know why I think the cur has gone to Montana, but I have a feeling that I am on the right track," Kut said to himself. It was about 2 p. m. when Kut boarded the train for Minneapolis, and it would be about 7.40 when he arrived in the Mill City.

After riding a couple of hours in the day coach, Kut got up, stretched his wheels and rolled back through the two Pullman cars attached to the rear of the train. He noticed that nearly all the occupants of the Pullmans wore many fine-looking diamonds and seemed to have plenty of wealth; so Kut decided that he would do a real stunt in the "hold-up" line, and pull the whole job himself, too. "If I succeed, I'll not have to divide with anyone nor ever fear being given away by a pal," he mused as he thought it all over carefully. After consulting the time-table a few minutes and making a few calculations, he slipped into the lavatory on the first Pullman and made up as a powerful negro, and just as the train was entering the suburbs of St. Paul he passed thru the first Pullman and locked the rear door after him, and then drove a big nail in the lock in such a way it would be impossible to unlock it from either side for hours; then he cut out about 5 feet of the bell-rope in the front end of the second Pullman, so they could not signal from that car to the engineer or conductor. The passengers were cleaning up and packing their bags and suit-cases preparatory to leaving the train at St. Paul when an immense jet-black African entered the car and threatened to shoot anyone who offered the slightest resistance or refused to hand over his diamonds and cash. A small Hebrew tolt (*traveling salesman*) from New York was a passenger on the Pullman and had about \$50,000 worth of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, pearls, etc., and about \$15,000 cash belonging to his house. The prospect of losing all that vast fortune was too much for this disciple and descendant of Moses, so he threw up the window and started to jump thru with his precious sample-case in his hands; but the robber saw his intention and, divining his purpose and realizing that he must be a bird well worth picking, sent

a bullet into his right ankle as he was lifting it thru the window and such a howl of pain no one ever heard before. The drummer thot he was killed entirely, and the way he howled and begged for his life disgusted the other passengers, for the little toolt was the only one of his race on the train. Even then he held onto his sample-case and loudly protested against giving it up. Kut had no time to parley with him, so he handed him a clip over his bean that promptly put him down and out. Some of the passengers thot that New York had lost a citizen and Judea a descendant, but they were poor guessers. The thot of losing all that wealth would have been enuff to bring any member of his race back from Death—or any other place. The other passengers readily gave up their cash and valuables without further protest, for not one of them was armed, and it would have done them little good if they had been. The way the robber dealt with the Jew was enuff for the most skeptical or obdurate. It took about ten minutes to finish the job, and then Kut applied the air-brakes and brot the train to almost a sudden stop. He then swung off and disappeared down a side street out in the suburbs. He had his suit-case and a big leather hand-bag, in the latter of which he stored the Jew's sample-case.

After walking a few blocks, he found a big barn at the rear of a big house that stood back half a block from the street. The barn opened out on the alley, and into this Kut dodged and soon found the room where the hostler lived, and as this contained lights, running water, soap and towels, it took Kut but a few minutes to remove the black "make-up" materials and appear in his proper person; then he slipped out and on down thru the orchard to the rear, and soon emerged upon another street that had a *strelk* line. (*Strelk* is the new word for a *street car*.) He boarded the first car going toward the city, and in about twenty minutes was down town and looking for a good hotel; he was soon domiciled in the principal hostelry. The next morning he went out and bought another big suit-case, in which he stored his valuables. The money he carried in two big belts and sewed up in his underclothing. This train robbery netted him over \$62,000 in cash and about \$130,000 in diamonds and other precious stones. That night he started for Montana and the pursuit of Brinkley. All that day the bright police arrested negroes all over St. Paul and Minneapolis, but could not fasten the "hold-up" on any of the poor devils.

After about two days *en route*, Kut arrived in Butte, Montana, and began his hunt for Brinkley. How he succeeded we will defer

telling until a later date, and in the meantime we ask our readers to accompany us to a small country town away back and down in the Ozarks of Missouri, where we will presently introduce them to *the Suffrajet* of our story.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS KELDORA MISSOURI STORM.

Away back in the early sixties Colonel Lexington Storm, of Kentucky, was married to Miss Veldena Birdsong, of Mississippi, at Natchez, Miss. The Colonel came of the best and proudest blood of the Old South, and his ancestors came from Virginia and the Carolinas. He was reared near Lexington, Ky., and when his parents passed away he drifted to New Orleans, and at one of the old-time Mardi-Gras festivals in the Crescent City he met a rare and beautiful girl that was a real daughter of the Southland. She lived in Natchez, Miss., with her widowed mother and a younger brother. She was just in her twentieth year when she met the distinguished and dashing young Kentuckian, and the attraction was mutual from the start. The Colonel paid ardent court and soon sought her hand in marriage. He was accepted and they were married in the Crescent City. The newly married couple took a river trip for their honeymoon, and after a few months' sojourn on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, they returned to Natchez, Miss., on account of Veldena's mother being seriously ill with the dread yellow fever. After a brief illness, she suddenly passed away.

In the meantime Lex (as his intimates called him) had received two letters from an old college chum who had left Kentucky and gone out into the wilds of Missouri to find fortune or anything else that State had to offer. He located in the southern part of the State and discovered that it was a peach of a country. He begged Lex to come out there and locate and help him grow up with the country. It was very healthy and the yellow fever was never known there. This sounded good to Lex and his young wife, so they set their prow toward Missouri and arrived about the middle of September, when the fruits and everything else are ripe and beautiful. Things looked good to them and they decided to stick. Lex and Veldena both had considerable money and saw the wisdom of investing in that wonderful soil; so they bought up about 1500 acres of fine farm and grazing land for a mere song, built themselves a log house and went to farming and stock-raising on a large scale. They pros-

pered from the start and, as they loved each other, they were very happy and contented.

About two years after their arrival, a rare and radiant little girl came to bless this perfect union and to add new flowers and jewels of happiness to their lives. She was all that any couple could wish or desire and brought their lives closer together, if such a thing were possible. As the Colonel and his wife were both romantic and sentimental, they decided on a rare and beautiful name for the little one—*Miss Keldora Missouri Storm*, and the youngster surely did live up to it.

Colonel Lexington Storm and his wife were both educated and talented people and both of them were musicians of no mean degree. Veldena was also an artist and their cabin bore testimony to her talent and good taste. When two such exceptional and talented people of romantic and artistic mould unite under the banner of *Love* and live in such a wild and beautiful habitat as southern Missouri was at that time, it is no wonder their rare talents and exceptional natures were united and amplified in their offspring. They weren't long in discovering that their daughter was a genius and also had "*a mind of her very own*," as the Colonel remarked to his wife one evening when Keidora was about two years old. The Colonel and his wife were both radical and broad-minded, and had never allied themselves with the church, as most of their nabors had done. Of course they were severely criticised by their pious nabors for this scandalous dereliction of duty, as it was generally termed in the naborhood; but as the Storm family were moral and well-behaved people and always led in all good and charitable work, the criticisms of the pious and Heaven-bound folks failed to make much of an impression.

Keldora was a chip off both the old blocks, so to speak, and as she grew up a wild and woolly little *Missouri flower*, she was not only the joy of their lives, but the pride and terror of the naborhood. She not only early showed a marked talent for music and art, but developed a "*ruling spirit*," as old Deacon Stuart termed it. When the youngster was about five years old the Deacon found her out in a near-by orchard one day, trying to teach a pet sheep to do some fancy steps that greatly resembled a waltz movement. He watched the child for a few minutes, and then in a shocked voice exclaimed:

"My child, you can't teach a sheep such wicked things as dancing, and you must not try to any more!"

"You know a heap what *I* can do," sarcastically returned the child in a mildly defiant manner that both shocked and surprised the good man. "Just watch me, Mr. Deak, and I'll show you a few things you don't happen to know."

"Attention, Billie! Right! left! right! left!" and the child illustrated the step so perfectly and easily that the sheep was soon swaying gently from side to side and keeping step with the child. She then put her arm around Billie's (the sheep's) neck and loved and petted him awhile and gave him a lump of sugar; then she squared off and resumed the dancing lesson—much to the Deacon's amusement and disapproval.

"Now, Billie, right! left! right! left! Swing around—no! no! not that way, Billie! Do it this way," and she demonstrated it so perfectly that, after a few awkward trials, the sheep was able to execute the turn in the waltz movement in a way that would have delighted any old-time dancing master. Then she petted Billie some more and divided her last two lumps of sugar with him.

"Now, Mr. Deak, you see you don't know what a real live-wire *can* do," and she made a low and mock bow toward the man of God that further shocked and provoked him. "Some of these days, when I get thru with Billie's lessons, I'll see if I can't teach *you* a few fancy steps." Then she put her arm around Billie's neck and the two wandered farther away down in the orchard.

"Sakes alive!" exclaimed the good Deacon to himself as he started back toward the road to resume his journey homeward. "What on earth will we all do with such a child of the Devil in our midst?"

CHAPTER XIII.

KELDORA ATTENDS HER FIRST SCHOOL.

As Colonel and Mrs. Storm did not believe in rushing a child's education, little Keldora was not sent to school until she was nearly eight; however, her mother had carefully taught her the alphabet and many of the rudiments of spelling, reading, etc.; so, when the few widely scattered settlers of that wild region had finally built themselves a rough log school-house and had secured the Rev. Silvester Powers, an old-time circuit-rider who visited them occasionally, to teach the first term for them, the Storms decided it might be best to send Keldora and see if she could learn anything.

"If she doesn't learn anything from the reverend teacher," facetiously remarked Lex to his wife, the Sunday evening before the

school was to begin, "she'll most likely teach him a few kinks that won't hurt him very much."

"Yes, dear husband, our little hoidenish Sunbeam is quite capable of making the pious old *sky-owl* sit up and blink a little."

Then Veldena slipped an arm thru her husband's and they wandered down the little shaded path that led to the bubbling spring down near the little *Singing Brook* that purled and yodled by their cabin and then silently sparkled away around a hazy-topped mountain that loomed in the distance. The location of their home was romantic and ideal to the last degree. The cabin nestled at the foot of a majestic-looking mountain and commanded an excellent view of the winding valley beyond, and also the ravine to the rear and down which dreamed a typical little mountain brook from the haze-capped peaks beyond; and just where this little stream of pure and clear water made a bend to the right in order to flow along with the valley the Storms had built their cabin home on the inside of this elbow; so their house faced south-east and looked out on the river from the east, the south-east and south and south-west, and the gently sloping Ozark mountain stood like a faithful sentinel all around them to the rear; and about half-way from the cabin to the brook was a cool and bubbling spring of delicious soft water—an Ozark nectar that would inspire a wooden Indian to write *vers libre* and sing *alto* with the whippoorwills. All the way from the cabin door down to the spring and on to the river they had built a beautiful grape-vine arbor and had trained morning glory vines all over it, so the purple flowers could help the ripening grapes sing weird matins to the morning sun—the great *God of Day*. And oh, how the wild birds did revel and sing in the leafy bower! and how soon they became friends of the Storm family, and pals of little Keldora! The birds soon learn who their friends are, and once the little winged citizens of Nature know that you are civilized and will not harm them, they are friends indeed. It was in this ideal environment of wild and natural beauty that this strange and talented child received her first impressions of life, and as her parents had not taught her any *religion* or superstition, it is no wonder she did not get along very well with her new teacher—the Rev. Silvester Powers, circuit-rider and school-master. The child did not know the meaning of deceit nor hypocrisy, and anything that was not honest and natural shocked her. Her whole life and that of her parents had been honest and natural and all her impulses were good and kind. She had been taught by her parents

that she must be kind and fair to all that liveth. *Lying* was a word she never learned until she became a pupil of the Rev. Powers.

And all around this model little nest that *Love* and *Art* had built was a profusion of flowers in the front and all kinds of fruit trees and berry bushes to the rear and on both sides. This family of intellectuals and humanitarians were vegetarians, fruitarians and nutarians, and did not believe in killing the other creatures except in *self-defense*, and unless man was the aggressor and attacker, they seldom had any troubles with the other animals. The Ozarks are a natural land for fruit and flowers, and most of the food-nuts grow in wild profusion; in fact, it was only play in those days to make a good living. It is only the advent of the *profiteers* and their hellish system of gouging and short-weighting, and the inevitable wars and legal battles that grow out of the system, that has made life a *pitiless struggle*. Making a living was a mere incident then. The main thing was enjoying the beauties and unlimited bounties of Nature and being happy; to love and be loved; to keep in close touch with our *Great Primeval Mother—Mrs. Earth*.

When Man gave up his natural life,
To take up the dollar-chase,
He filled this world with woe and strife,
And now it's hell in every place.

Under such a beautiful and natural environment, it's no wonder Keldora developed into a rare and beautiful girl with a soul like a flower garden and a mind that fairly sizzled and sparkled with life and brilliancy. She was soon known as the *Gem of the Ozarks*. It was both amusing and interesting in later years to hear her relate her experience the "first day at school."

Besides herself, there were five other little girls and seven boys—kids ranging in age from six to eleven. All but two of them were on hand before the teacher arrived, and they hove to shortly after "school took up." The reverend gentleman arrived aboard a dyspeptic and pessimistic-looking gray mule that seemed utterly beyond the power of prayer or hay. I doubt if "*Vicarious Atonement*" and Revised Peruna could have pried him out of his sins. He looked almost as gloomy and sanctified as his master. At the forenoon recess those kids proceeded to look this *Primeval Ford* over from jib-boom to mizzenmast, and it didn't take much mind-reading or clairvoyance to discover that his muleship had not made much of a hit with his master's pupils. The little heathens didn't say much, but it

wouldn't require a weather prophet to predict bad weather for that mule. Keldora, having been taught to "be kind to all that liveth," was about the only friend that poor animal had; but he didn't know it nor appreciate it then. When the noon hour arrived and school was "dismissed," the teacher removed Jeremiah (the mule's name) from the tree to which he had tied him on arriving that morning, and tied him to another sapling farther away and where the grass was more in evidence. Instead of proceeding to eat the grass, Jeremiah looked sullen and defiant and began to viciously paw the ground about the tree.

"What's the matter with the fetchtaked critter anyway?" exclaimed the teacher, more to himself than to the children, who were silently watching the proceedings a short distance away. "Don't any of you children go nigh Jeremiah nor pester him, for he may be goin' to have one of his spells again!" admonished the reverend instructor in a tone of awe.

This only whetted their appetites, for a mule that had "spells" was something decidedly new—and, of course, *interesting*. So, as soon as the teacher had sauntered back into the school-house, they appointed a committee of *thirteen* (their entire number) to investigate Jeremiah and see if they could diagnose his strange complaint. One of the boys (*Tom Henley*) said that he had an uncle who was a "hoss doctor" in Arkansaw, and he was elected chairman of the committee. Tom was something of a leading spirit anyway, and was always in the foremost rank when watermelons were to be stolen, or any other expedition that savored of cussedness was to be carried thru. And it didn't take the reverend teacher long to get Tom's measure about right. He intuitively sensed from the first day of school that Tom Henley and righteousness were not exactly synonymous terms, so he wisely decided to keep a strict watch on the "little red-headed cuss," as he designated the lad to himself. But the teacher's opinion of him mattered not at all to Tom. Tom never had any ambition to be an angel in the "Next World" nor to win a bunch of *E-marks* from school-teachers in this world. Tom was in for a good time and it didn't make any difference to him *who* paid the orchestra.

After watching Jeremiah's antics for awhile and venturing various opinions in regard to his mental status, Keldora sidled up toward his front end cautiously and when within about 3 feet from his oat-eating apparatus, she smiled and reached out a dainty and friendly hand toward his homely and tear-streaked nose, and coo-

ingly asked of him: "What's the matter with you, poor mule?"

Whether or not the distressed animal understood her language, he sensed that she was friendly and sympathetic, for he immediately leaned his great long and gaunt ears forward to her and actually smiled and tried to reach her with his nose.

"Keep away from him, kid!" yelled several of the boys in one breath; "he'll kill yer!"

Keldora only smiled and reached out her hand and patted Jeremiah's face and then came up closer and pressed her own face against his ugly one and continued to pet him and coo to him like a young mother trying to soothe her sick child. And the look of peace and happiness that radiated itself all over Jeremiah's countenance made him almost beautiful and human-looking. Then the child calmly announced that Jeremiah wanted water and his awful thirst made him almost delirious.

"How'd yer know what ther pesky critter wants?" sneeringly asked Tom Henley.

"'Cause he told me he did," came back Keldora, and she gave Tom such a look of scorn and pity that it settled him.

"Awh! ther mule cain't talk to yer," allowed Sam Phelps. "What yer givin' us, kid?"

"Course he can," asserted the child; "he talks with his *eyes*, and I can understand him. I'm going to get him a drink."

Then she untied the animal, and with one hand on his bridle and the other one fondling his face, she led him like a docile sheep down to the brook near by, and it was a sight to see the way that poor animal did drink and drink. It seemed as tho he could not get enuff of the precious and life-giving fluid to quench his thirst; and when he had finally absorbed all his hide could hold, he gratefully turned to the child, rubbed his nose against her and refused to leave her. Then Keldora mounted to his back and in triumph rode back to the school-house just as the master came out to ring the "take-up" bell for the pupils to resume work for the afternoon. When he saw the girl astride Jeremiah and all the other kids trailing along and laffing and guying fit to kill, his wrath immediately kindled and he came running out to snatch her from Jeremiah's back and to a place of safety, for he really feared the mule would hurt the child.

"Little vixen! How dare you disobey me and risk your life on that pesky critter, that do be possessed of evil speerits at times?" went on the irate man of God and the Ozarks. And just as he landed Keldora in a place of safety Jeremiah landed on the reverend

gentleman with both hind feet, that caught him square amidships, and when the children picked him up about 20 feet away and he was able to get his bearings once more, he observed that Jeremiah and Keldora were walking around toward the rear of the school-house with her arm around his neck and like a couple of lovers.

"There goes that witch of Satan enticin' of my mule away!" roared the Reverend as he limped and hobbled back to the school-house by the assistance of the children.

The little imps were secretly glad that Jeremiah had taken judgment into his own hands—or heels, rather—and had administered a knock-out blow the first round, and they all felt a sneaking pride in the mule after that, and changed their minds about playing pranks on the poor animal. Jeremiah had suddenly risen to new heights in their estimation, and they now regarded him as a pal and one of the gang. It developed that the man of God had ridden the poor beast all the preceding afternoon without water and had "forgotten" to water him that night, and was in too big a hurry next morning to either feed or water the poor brute. He was so busy attending to "God's work," as he termed his pastoral duties, that he had no time to be just and merciful to one of his Master's dumb creatures. The little girl's kindness and humanity, or mule-anity, awoke the divine spark that is often dormant in the other animals, and Jeremiah became her disciple and slave.

After nursing his wrath for a few minutes and groaning on the Brink of Profanity, the Reverend nervously announced that school would be out for the day, but he hoped to be on deck for to-morrow. He asked Tom and some of the older boys to catch Jeremiah for him, as he must take the pesky critter home in some way. The boys were reluctant to do so, but he finally prevailed on them to help him; so they set out around the school-house, but Jeremiah and Keldora were both disappearing down around the hill and toward the girl's home. Jeremiah followed along at the child's heels and kept rubbing his nose and chin on her shoulders in the most affectionate manner; and at intervals she would stop to pet him and mumble something to the poor animal that only creatures with *souls* can understand; and it seemed that poor Jeremiah had the biggest kind of a soul—only his former master had never been able to reach it—with *brutality* and *neglect*.

Tom and the other kids hurried after the fleeing lovers and halloed for them to stop, as the teacher wanted his mule back.

"All right; come on and get him, boys," calmly invited Keldora. Then she stepped a few feet away and waited for their move.

Jeremiah turned his head and quietly looked the boys over a minute, and as he seemed to divine their purpose, he laid his long, steamboat-smokestack ears back almost level with his neck and waited. Sam and Tom and Jake (*Fensler*) carefully approached the animal and tried to talk sweet and friendly camouflage to him, like they had heard Keldora use, but Jeremiah knew friends from enemies. When the boys had reached a point about 20 feet away, they began to divide and circle around him, with the evident intention of making a simultaneous attack from three directions; but Jeremiah was something of a military tactician himself, so he immediately started a counter-movement that put his enemies to rout in a hurry. He reversed himself and ran rapidly backward about 10 feet and then jumped into the air, and as he came down his hind feet shot out like lightning, and Tom barely ducked a knock-out blow on the head. He received part of it on his right shoulder and that extracted most of the belligerency out of Thomas. Jake was not so fortunate in side-stepping Jeremiah's uppercuts, so he received a left heel on the side of his face and went down and out. Sam suddenly remembered that his folks had often told him to always hurry home as soon as school was out.

Regarding his work with satisfaction and approval, Jeremiah turned aside where the grass was tender and sweet and proceeded to treat himself to a bellyful of uncut hay, while Keldora became a *Red Cross* nurse and administered "first aid" to the injured. She soon revived Jake, and after finding that the boys could get home all right, she went over and patted Jeremiah on the neck and said some soft nothing in that mysterious soul-language of hers, and then she and her new friend and champ again started for the girl's home.

When they arrived at the Storm yard, both Colonel and Mrs. Storm were seated on the front porch, chatting and dreaming. They were rather surprised at Keldora's strange and forlorn-looking guest; however, they were getting used to her surprises. She hurriedly related the day's experiences and the early dismissal of the school. Her parents roared with laughter, but informed her that the animal must be returned to its rightful owner.

"I just know he won't ever stay with that cruel old fiddlestick," pouted the child, for she had a strong sense of the victor and disliked to give up her spoils—and wasn't Jeremiah her spoils, that she

had fairly won thru kindness and humanity? "Ask the mule," pouted the little one to herself.

"The Reverend will be over to-morrow after his mount, and we must restore him, my dauter," explained the Colonel.

The child hadn't a very clear insight, as yet, into man's laws of *ownership*, and she persisted that the decision should be left to Jeremiah.

"All right, little sunbeam; we'll see what Jeremiah has to say about it when the Reverend comes after him," assured the father.

Then Keldora hurried down to where the animal was contentedly browsing in the lower part of the yard, and gently led him away toward the stable and there found some corn and oats for her guest, and while he lazily ate to repletion she got a curry-comb and gave him the only real soul-satisfying scratching he ever had; and the grunts of approval and pleased looks he bestowed on the child well repaid Keldora for all her trouble. But it was never a bit of trouble for her to be kind and help others; she had been taught the religion of *Humanity* and the *Power of Kindness*.

The next forenoon the Reverend and a cousin of his came over with a couple of ropes to lasso the truant and bring him to repentance, as the man of God expressed it to his nabors. This cousin was the only help the Reverend could command, and he would have declined, only he was in debt to the teacher and owed him other obligations.

Keldora was up early that morning and had prepared a dainty little breakfast for her belligerent guest, and had had quite a talk with him.

As soon as Jeremiah saw his enemies approaching with ropes, a malignant look of hatred steadied his eyes, and he slanted those wonderful ears back at just the right angle, and then decided to go over the top, like the Yanks and "Ladies of Hell." He ran in a semi-crouching attitude directly at the teacher, and as the lame man tried to cast his rope over the mule's head Jeremiah ducked just in time to miss it, and in another second he was upon his former master with both fore feet and had him by the neck with his mouth. Just then the other man ran up and tried to throw his rope over Jeremiah's neck, but it fell short and rolled off his back. Just as he rushed up to get his rope for another try Jeremiah made one of his famous back jumps and landed with both heels on the man's chest.

The fight was over, and Jeremiah stood erect, with a challenge

in both eyes, and quietly walked back to the yard fence, where Keldora was, all smiles. He walked with the air of a conqueror—the proud and defiant step of a Napoleon, a Pershing or a Foch. Keldora greeted him as her sex has always greeted the conqueror. Then she slipped him a lump of maple sugar and whispered a mysterious *something* in his long and willing ears. Then he looked back at his routed and wounded foes with an actual smile on his homely face.

Keldora then hurried to help her parents give “first aid” to the wounded and to carry the men to the house. They were not seriously hurt, and after resting a few hours and partaking of refreshments, decided they did not want any more mule.

The Reverend insisted on having “the pesky brute of Satan” shot and fed to “the sky-soaring buzzards”; but Keldora demurred to this useless piece of brutality, and the Colonel asked the Reverend the value of the mule. “Erbout a fifty, I reckon,” the man of God allowed. The Colonel promptly bought Jeremiah at this figure, and the man of God and his cousin departed.

Keldora was delighted, for the child and the mule had become real pals. It was a beautiful sight to see the little girl riding the patient and faithful animal about the naborhood, and when the story became local history and the truth of the matter came out, Jeremiah and Keldora were welcomed everywhere. For years afterward she rode him to and from school and in to the village 5 miles away and over on the other side of the mountain.

After resting up a bit, the reverend teacher decided to serve his Master in new fields; so he got one of the Billings boys to “carry” him over to a naboring town about 30 miles away and into Arkansaw.

The school went glimmering for nearly a year before they secured another teacher. The new teacher was a young lady from Tennessee, and she at once became popular with the kids, for she ruled them with kindness, and as she lived at the Storm home, she and Keldora were pals from the start and hit it off beautifully together. She was only twenty and this was her first school, but she made good and kept the school for nearly five years, until she yielded to the pleadings of *Cupid*, and married a fine young man of the naborhood.

Jeremiah liked the new teacher as well as the pupils did, and it was no uncommon sight on Saturdays to see both girls riding him over to the village or around in the naborhood on Sundays and even-

ings. They never had to hitch him, for he was faithful and always there when they were ready to start. What a lesson Keldora had taught that cold and heartless man of God in the use of kindness as a ruling force for either man or beast! Everything responds to it and is lifted up and made better by it.

CHAPTER XIV.

KELDORA ATTENDS HER FIRST FAIR.

Keldora was heart-broken when her beloved teacher and all-around pal, Miss Wilma Weston, gave up school-teaching for the big and mysterious fields of matrimony, for the child realized in a faint way that her chum was lost to her forever. Keldora was very deep and constant in all her likes and dislikes, and she did hate to give up her beloved Wilma; but Fate had issued her inexorable decree and there was no appeal from the decision. Miss Weston was a high-grade young woman and endowed with a deep and affectionate nature, and she felt the primal urge in her clamoring for love and a nest of her *own* and some little ones to make life complete and furnish the finishing touch of color. Keldora had learned very rapidly under Miss Weston's tutelage, for she was such a naturally bright child it was no trouble at all for her to learn and to retain everything she learned. Her teacher declared that Keldora had caught up with her and was passing on beyond her; so she told the Storms that the child should now be sent to an exclusive and high-class school for young ladies, where her remarkable talents might receive the finishing touches; so it was decided to take her to Nashville and there place her in charge of such an institution, as that was the nearest point to such a school.

Springfield, Missouri, was about the only place in the Ozarks that could be called a town, in those wild and woolly days, and it required considerable elasticity of the imagination to so designate it. But Springfield was the biggest pebble on the Ozark beach, at all events, and to advertise themselves and emphasize their importance the good people of that burg organized a County Fair and invited the whole of creation to come on and enjoy themselves. There were no lids and Bevo in those dear old days. "Eat, drink and do just as you damned please" was the rule. It was taken for granted that most of the boobs had enuff sense to behave themselves fairly well, so the people squeezed along without lids and *substitutes*. The fairs in those good old days of peace and plenty were different affairs from what they are to-day. They were more like social gatherings

of the country and town people for the purpose of exhibiting the best products of the farm and factories, and to visit and exchange news and ideas; in short, to have a real old-fashioned *Fall Festival*—a revival of the old pagan festivals to celebrate the harvests and autumn's rich content; and as horses were a large part of man's life, both in the towns and country, the horse-races were a large and popular part of all such fairs. The fakir, the crook and the dollar-chaser were not much in evidence in those days. The people went there for a good time—not to chase dollars. Colonel Storm, like all true Kentuckians, was a lover of horseflesh, and always had some animals that could go some.

Before carrying Keldora off to Nashville, which place would be more like a prison than anything else to a wild and free nature like the child possessed, her parents decided to take her to the great fair at Springfield and let her see the many sights, the most of which would be new and wonderful to the child. Colonel Storm had the finest team of perfectly matched young gray mares that were just four years old, and he also had faith in their stepping abilities; so he decided to drive them in their new harness and to the family carriage, which seated four persons comfortably. Wilma's husband, Robert Clinton Page, had planned to go in his two-seated top-buggy, but two days before one of his high-steppers had severely hurt its leg getting over a fence, so it could not be used until it had recovered. The Colonel invited the youngsters to go with him and Mrs. Storm in their family carriage, as that would just make a nice little family party. Of course Keldora could squeeze in somewhere between them; but that wild and reckless little Indian had formed other plans—she would ride her own fiery little pony, Prince Fleet-foot. This pony was also a goer when he and Keldora were both in the mood for some reckless speeding. It was no unusual thing to see her and the Prince go flying along the road at the modest rate of about 90 miles an hour. Her mother tried to persuade her to leave Prince at home and go with them in the carriage, but Keldora had her heart set on riding her own mount, and then she could have some fun if she wanted to; and it wasn't often she didn't enjoy some fun and excitement. The Colonel was always inclined to side in with her, and the child usually had her own way, and so it was in this case; therefore Keldora rode her Prince and she surely sat him like an Arab or Gipsy princess. She could ride or drive anything that went on legs, wheels, wings or fins, and the wildest colts, that had never had even a halter on them, readily submitted

to her mastery and at once became docile and safe. The most stubborn creature the child ever rode was an old turkey gobbler that weighed 68 pounds in his stocking feet. Keldora was only three years old then, and the bird strenuously objected at first, but after a few hours of training and disciplining he submitted, but with his wings crossed; however, the little hoiden continued to ride him every day until he was used for a Thanksgiving dinner at the Storm cabin. Keldora had that *Indefinable Something* in her which made her the master of everything she went after. It was the dominant trait in her mind and early showed itself. So when they set out for the fair early Monday morning, Keldora led the party and decided to show them a few *thrillers* in the way of going a little. She gave Prince the signal to go ahead, and it was a sight to see them leave the Old Folks far behind. It was only about 85 miles to Springfield, but they arrived late that afternoon and found lodgings for the night.

The next day they all went out to the fair-grounds bright and early, for they did not want to miss anything. They drove right inside the grounds and unhitched their horses and tied them to the carriage, and Keldora anchored Prince to a burr oak sapling. Almost everything was new and wonderful to the young people, and they surely did enjoy themselves. In the afternoon several races were scheduled to be run. The first was a mile pace, and the winner got \$100; there were seven entries for this race. The next was a mile trot, and it was more exciting, as there were nine entries. Keldora wanted to take a flyer on this race, but her parents would not let her have the money. The last race for the day, and the big event, was a running race, but there were only six entries. As the beautiful animals were jockeyed up and down in front of the stand the audience had a chance to study and admire them.

"Oh, papa! I just know that little black mare will be the winner—bet on her for me?" coaxed the child.

"No, dear; your father is not going to bet on any of the races," quietly explained Mrs. Storm.

"Umph! he's afraid to," butted in a stranger and in a tone of irritating sarcasm.

This was too much for the Colonel's Southern blood, so he quietly looked the man over with a critical eye and then indifferently remarked:

"Oh! am I? Perhaps the gentleman has a hundred dollars that talks the same way?" and the Colonel dug down in his jeans

and fished out a fat and sassy roll that had a chip on its shoulder.

"Sure thing, my friend—name your hoss," and he got out quite a respectable-sized roll.

"Bet it on the little black mare, papa, for I just know she will win," urged Keldora and with the enthusiasm of a turf fan.

"No, Lex; put up your money—don't bet with a *stranger*," coldly flashed Mrs. Storm.

"Beg pardon, sir, but my name is Henry Bracken, and I hail from Memphis. What might your name be?" said the man in correct English.

As the stranger had promptly introduced himself and seemed to be a man of education, the Colonel introduced himself, and announced that he would try out a *Century Willie Boy* on his dauter's judgment. Mr. Bracken promptly covered the Colonel's hundred, and then easily remarked:

"I really owe you an apology, sir, for the abrupt way I challenged you, and I hope you will overlook it."

"Oh! that's all right, sir—forget it. Have a smoke on me?" and the Colonel handed over his well-filled cigar-case. The stranger politely accepted one, but as he caught a look on Mrs. Storm's face, he slipped it in his pocket and casually remarked he'd smoke it later on—"to quiet my nerves if I lose my bet."

After about ten minutes of jockeying, the nags were off, and they had about as fair and even a start as it is possible to get.

"Remember," observed Colonel Storm to the stranger, "I'm betting that the little black mare wins. Which one are you betting on, sir?"

"Oh! I'm just betting that she won't," smiled Mr. Bracken.

"That way you have the field backed against my choice," dryly observed the Colonel; "but it's all right—we're game, aren't we, Kel?"

"Sure thing, papa—the little black wins against the field, or I'm no judge of horses," defiantly laffed Keldora.

They had to go around the track twice to make the mile, and at the half a long and rangy bay horse with the chassis of a jack-rabbit and a war-plane was a little in the lead; but when they came under the wire on the first round a long-limbed sorrel had a length the best of it, and the black mare was only third and seemed to be losing ground. Mrs. Storm groaned, but the Colonel and Keldora sat firm and almost held their breath. At the half post on the second and last round the little black had forged up to the second

place, and she and the stork-legged sorrel seemed to be playing poker and the sky was the only limit. At the three-quarter post the sorrel was doing his level best, but the little mare was breathing hard right on his neck and gaining slightly. The audience began to scramble to their feet and yell and shout. Keldora let out a yell like a lost demon, and it seemed that the little mare heard it or understood it, for she made a tremendous spurt ahead and came in under the wire nearly two lengths ahead of the sorrel. There was the usual wild shouting and groaning, but Keldora just gave one big jump and landed with both arms around her father's neck and luffed and cried by turns, and then kissed and kissed him until her mother took her in charge. Bracken was game and politely congratulated the "little sport," as he facetiously called Keldora. She told him she was sorry he lost so much money, but she was so glad her papa was the one to win it. Mrs. Storm tried to look dignified and provoked at her husband and daughter, but it was no go. Woman-like, she couldn't help admiring the victors—and especially as they were her loved ones.

The next day was a busy and eventful one in which Keldora carried off the honors. There was only one horse-race that day, but quite a lot of foot-races and other athletic sports. Among the foot-races was one for children from ten to fifteen, and the prize was a five-dollar gold-piece. There were seventeen boys in this and one timid little red-headed girl of eleven; but when she saw that she was the only girl entering it, she was for backing out. Keldora wanted to get in this race and win new laurels, but her mother just would not hear of it; and the Colonel rather sided with his wife this time.

"Oh, mama! my foot hurts me—I've got some sand or something in my shoe," and she stooped down to fumble with her shoe, and when she found her parents were not paying much attention to her, she ducked away and ran around to where the judges were sorting up the kids for the race and to see that older ones did not slip in on it. The little girl that was going in it was standing by and looking very much disappointed. Keldora went up to her and put her arm around the child's shoulders and asked:

"Won't they let little girls run in this race?"

"Yes; but as I was the only girl that was going in it, I backed out," modestly admitted the child.

"Back out nothing!" thundered Keldora, with blazing eyes; "we'll just show those smart old boys that they aren't the only kids

that's got limber legs! Off with your shoes, kid, and I'll run with you." And with this both girls sat down and tore off their shoes and stockings.

One of the judges, seeing their actions and divining their intentions, came up and remarked:

"You girls had better keep out'n this, for you have no chance anyway. There are three boys in that crowd that can do some lively stepping, I'm tellin' you. How old are you, sissy?" he asked Keldora.

"I'm thirteen, and I'll just show you whether or not those boys can run," she handed right back to him.

"All right; I ain't sayin' you can't run, but you have no show to win." Then he went back to his two companions and told them the two little girls wanted to run.

"Sure thing," laughed his companion, who was something of a sport; "the more the merrier, and we want to give the people the worth of their money."

So it was settled, and the seventeen boys and the two little girls were all lined up and made to toe a line, so they would all have a fair start.

Mrs. Storm had soon missed Keldora and she and the Colonel had inaugurated a search for her. Just then they heard a shout and rushed back to the rail to see the race, and to their consternation Keldora was running down the center of the bunch, bareheaded and hair flying like an Indian. but *gaining at every step*. The distance was only 500 yards—a straight dash down the track in front of the stand. The other little girl (*Mina Phelps*) was also holding her own, and was only outrun by two of the taller boys and only by about 3 feet; but Keldora just easily left them all behind and won by fully 30 feet. She seemed to just fly. She received the five dollars in gold and a tremendous ovation, for in those days it was an unheard-of thing for a girl to do such a thing, and then to actually win and by such a big margin! The men rushed around her and picked her up and carried her on their shoulders up to the stand, and everybody wanted to know whose girl she was, etc. The Colonel and his wife finally made their way thru the crowd and rescued her. The judges introduced themselves and wanted to know where they lived and a thousand other things. And oh, how the little Indian did enjoy her triumph and treasure that gold-piece! The Colonel was secretly pleased that she had won the race, but his wife felt that the child was making too much of an exhibition

of herself and bringing them all into the limelight too publicly; but it made no difference to Keldora, for she had won fairly and was entitled to her laurels.

"Papa, you keep this gold-piece for me and let me have another five?" coaxed Keldora, for she wouldn't think of spending it.

"All right, dear; here you are—a brand-new five-dollar bill."

Keldora slipped it down in her stocking and looked supremely happy; and so was the Colonel proud and happy to be the father of such a child.

"Why, she has really won one hundred and five dollars since coming up here, for if it had not been for her wanting to back the little mare, and Biacken's impudent taunt, I would never have bet on the race at all, for Veldena is so opposed to gambling and such things. Why, this money she's won will more than pay for our expenses up here and leave quite a tidy sum for her trip to Nashville," murmured the Colonel to himself. "I wouldn't take a million for her—even if she does keep her mother and me in fear and trembling most of the time," continued the father, with a proud look on his handsome features. "I wonder what'll be her next venture—for she is quite capable of putting over most anything that will astonish the natives."

That night they all went to the theater and Keldora saw her first performance, and declared that she could do most of what they did, and do it better, too. Mrs. Storm laughed at the girl's conceit, but the Colonel didn't know about it. He was now ready to back his little daughter in almost anything she set her willful little head on.

That night Keldora asked for her gold-piece and kissed it and petted it, and then sewed it up between two ribbons and tied it around her neck—"Just for luck, papa," she naively averred.

"All right, dear; anything to please our darling." And he then took her in his arms and loved and petted her until it was time to retire. She was the apple of his eye—the peach of his soul. That night she dreamed of the little black mare and the gold-piece, and her dreams surely were rosy and full of tangled vines and wild flowers.

They all went early to the grounds again the next day, and in the forenoon there was an exhibition on the race-track of fine horses, colts, ponies, cattle, etc. The Colonel drove his fine grays around the track and won first prize (ten dollars) for the best matched span of driving and buggy horses. Keldora was tickled with this, for

she dearly loved all their horses, and they all loved the child and obeyed her slightest command.

The last race that afternoon was a "*pony-race*," and the prize money was twenty-five dollars. The ponies were to weigh less than 800, and were to be ridden by boys of fifteen or under. Herc was a chance for Keldora to gain some more laurels and show the rubes what her beloved Prince could do. Mrs. Storm was very much opposed to it, but the Colonel couldn't find a peg to hang an objection on.

"You know, Lex, if anything should happen to the child, we would never forgive ourselves. Prince might fall and throw her and she might get killed," went on the timid and cautious mother.

"Oh, mother! you're such a croaker—to always be throwing cold water on the child and her desires." And the Colonel looked real provoked and hurt, for he knew that Keldora had her heart set on running her Prince in this race; and what if he didn't win—she'd enjoy the sport anyway, and it doesn't cost anything to try.

"Well, do as you think best; but if anything happens, you're entirely to blame." And then she turned to talk to one of their nabors who was also attending the fair.

Keldora threw her arms around her daddy's neck and fairly danced with delight and just smothered him with kisses and caresses. They went and got Prince ready and had him weighed, as that was the ruling of the judges, and he just pulled it down to 762—a close shave.

Awh! that fat old thing can't run," jibed a young fellow of about eighteen, and who had matted freckles that could make a crazy quilt green with envy.

"Have you any money to bet on it, Mr. Freckles?" shot Keldora back at him so quickly the other kids and young fellows gave him the laugh. Freckles had just blowed his last dime on a pink lemonade for his best girl—Sally Flanders—and wasn't even a tin-horn sport any more.

While the judges were weighing all the ponies about which there could be any doubts of over-weight, Keldora fondled Prince and whispered a lot of *Mysterious Somethings* in his short and pointed little ears, and as he frequently nodded and smiled, it is probable that he understood what his mistress was saying.

When Mr. Bracken learned that the "little sport" was the proud possessor of a stogy little pony and was going to run him in the pony-race, he went around to where the nags were being weighed

and groomed for the start. After studying Prince awhile and looking him over carefully, he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and remarked so that the girl could hear him:

"That little dump might run into the barn in time for oats and hay, but that's about all!"

Keldora caught this shot, and when she saw who fired it, she went right "over the top" after him:

"Oh! is that so, Mr.—er—Mr. Bracken, I believe? Perhaps you have another hundred you'd like to lose?" and she said it in such a fine tone of irony and scorn that it got under his cuticle good and plenty.

"Sure thing, little sport; I'd like to lose money all day on that *streak of lightning*," he boastingly replied.

This was too much—the idea of anyone daring to poke fun at her beloved Prince!

"Oh, papa! here's Mr.—er—Bracken again, and he's just itching to lose another hundred that my Prince can't run. Let me have the hundred, papa, dear, and we'll show this would-be sport a few things?"

"How do you want to bet this time, Mr. Bracken?" asked the Colonel, in order that there might not be any misunderstanding.

"Why, I'm betting a hundred that pudgy little tub don't win the race."

"Done!" said the Colonel, and he promptly covered the gentleman's money.

Then everybody began to crowd around the girl and her nag and make remarks and ask questions. Finally everything was ready, and the boys mounted on their steeds, fell in line and awaited the signal to go.

There were nineteen contestants and the distance was half a mile—one lap around the track. Keldora was the only girl in the bunch and the boys geyed her unmercifully and tried to rattle her so she wouldn't ride well; but they didn't know Keldora and the kind of stock she came from. Keldora never scared. She was a Storm, and they couldn't be bluffed by anyone or anything.

Everybody on the grounds was crowded around the track to see the pony-race, for it had become known that the little Storm girl had taken up the gauntlet that had been thrown down to her pony, and she wasn't the kind to take a dare from anyone; and the Colonel would rather have lost many times the amount he wagered than to have his little pet girl bluffed and humiliated. He was a

Storm, and a challenge meant fight where he was raised, and Keldora was indeed a chip off the old Storm block. Keldora wisely got around as near the inside of the track as possible, and there were only two ponies nearer the inside than hers. She had looked them all over and felt confident and hopeful.

The signal to go was at last given, and every pony except two jumped to it and plunged ahead as if they understood the importance of being the winner. Before they reached the first quarter Prince had got the inside and was gaining rapidly. When they reached the half only three others were within 10 feet of Prince, and at the three-quarter post Prince was just beginning to get interested and shot ahead with such velocity that Keldora had to turn her head in order to breathe, and when he came under the wire he was fully 300 feet ahead of his nearest competitor. The crowd went wild and made a rush for the girl and rode her on their shoulders around in front of the stand, and when the Colonel tried to rescue her, they picked him up and carried him also on their shoulders and shouted themselves hoarse. Talk about heroes—Keldora and her dad were some I T T T S S S all right enough.

Bracken was still game and came up and congratulated the "little sport" and said it was worth several times that amount to see her ride; and he 'lowed that he'd give a million if he had a gal like that.

That night they attended the theater again, and when the curtain went down on the first act, the audience yelled and shouted for "Miss Storm" to get up on the stage and say something. And they wouldn't be denied, either; so the manager of the company came down to where the Storms were seated and begged the "young lady" to respond to the tremendous *encore* she was receiving. Mrs. Storm protested violently, but the Colonel allowed it wouldn't hurt anything if Keldora did go up on the stage and say a few words, seeing the audience were set on hearing her; so Keldora jumped up and ran down the aisle before the manager could tell her to come with him and he'd introduce her. She deftly placed one hand on the footlight rail and lightly vaulted over it and landed on the stage with both feet. It was a remarkable feat and started the wild applause going again. She struck an attitude of humorous attention and waited for the applause to subside so she could speak. Then she said, with a low and mock bow:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm not much on speakifying, but I *can* run a little and I know a few things about Nature's noblest

creature—the horse (*great applause*); and if you're good to these poor friends of ours, you'll never have any trouble with them. Long live this faithful and patient animal, and when he cashes in and lights out for the Great Pastures Beyond, my good wishes will follow him."

And then she took a flying leap that landed her about half-way up the center aisle and was soon back in her seat with the Colonel's arm proudly around her. The audience yelled itself hoarse and tried in every way to entice her back again, but it was no use; she'd given them enough and stood firm. That was another family trait of the Storms—they could be as firm as Gibraltar when it was necessary. As all Southern people at that time (*and largely so yet*) were very fond of horses, the girl couldn't have made a more appropriate speech; and considering it was all impromptu, it was remarkable and showed her rare caliber.

The next day was Friday and the last day of the fair, but as Mrs. Stone had considerable shopping to do, they didn't attend the fair, but did their shopping and then about noon started for home, but stayed over night with a second cousin of the Colonel's, and then resumed their journey Saturday and arrived home Saturday evening. The family had never had so much fun and such a good time in all their lives, and they all vowed to go again next year; but "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft alee."

CHAPTER XV.

KELDORA GOES TO COLLEGE.

About a year after the Springfield fair and when Keldora was nearly fifteen, it was decided by the Storm family to take the youngster to Nashville and place her in a select and exclusive school for girls. Keldora was not a bit enthusiastic about the plan, for it meant restraint and discipline, and these were two words not in good standing in the young lady's vocabulary; however, her parents finally prevailed upon her to go and finish her education as became a young lady who wanted to be the proper thing and not have to be handicapped in later life by a lack of education. The Colonel had taught her to play the fiddle and her mother taught her the piano and some voice culture, but these were pleasures—mere nothings, because she could be at home and do about as she pleased. The girl learned everything as by magic and soon become proficient. She soon astonished her parents and the neighborhood by the easy and natural way she could make her dad's old

fiddle talk, paw the air or cry and weep. And the piano came just as easy, and her rich and pure voice was a wonder, for she sang a clear and strong soprano, a mezzo or an alto, and could sing a good baritone. Another talent she possessed in a high degree was her ability to mimic voices and sounds. There wasn't a bird nor animal in the country she couldn't fool by correctly imitating its voice and talk; and the way she could mimic a person's walk and manners was a caution; and whistle—that girl was a fife and calliope and whippoorwill combined—and then some. Her sense of humor was very strong, and she was a natural athlete and walked with a springy, lithe movement that resembled the graceful and well-poised movements of the tigers, panthers and other *Felidæ*. And dancing came as natural to her as music and eating does to a negro. And yet she was kind-hearted and generous and ever ready to lend a helping hand to those in distress. She had regular features, with the most wonderful hair and eyes, and a mouth that made you surrender at once. Her hair was a rare and weird shade of dark golden-brown and trimmed with every shade of the autumn leaves—a nest for the twilight and fairies to pow-wow and dream in; and the soft and whispering moonlight just wouldn't build its nest any other place than in Keldora's hair. Her eyes were volcanic *Dream-Stars*—great tawny diamonds, with a soft lavender haze smoldering in their bottomless depths, and that reminded one of full-blown pansies swaying and singing in the Southwind. There was a strange and indefinable *Something* loitering in her eyes which immediately got hold of your soul and shook hands with it. There was no getting away from those eyes when they once got hold of you. It was “unconditional surrender,” and you were willing to be a captive. Her hands were small and delicate and exceedingly white, shapely and aristocratic; and her feet were along the same high-bred lines. She immediately attracted attention wherever she went, and yet she was the most delightful little Democrat and *bon vivant* in all the world. Nothing stuck-up nor artificial about Keldora. According to her parentage and environment, she should have been haughty and domineering, but she was decidedly socialistic in her ideas and ideals. Where she got all these strange traits and ideas was a puzzle to her parents and friends, for both her parents were typical Southern Democrats of the Old Bourbon School, and very much inclined to be exclusive and aristocratic. The mother was particularly so, but the father was more inclined to broadness and liberality in matters social as well as in matters religious. Kel-

dora was passionately fond of flowers and children, and never tired of caring for babies and playing with them. And a cat or dog that wouldn't follow Keldora home was indeed a stoic and ascetic.

In those days traveling was a slow and tedious task, for railroads in that part of the world were mostly *non est*. After considerable planning, it was decided to drive thru by team and buggy, as this would afford an opportunity to see the country and rest when they wanted to. They had at first planned on driving to Cape Girardeau and taking a boat there for Paducah, and then catching one of the small steamers that plied the Cumberland River between Paducah and Nashville; but they figured it would be quicker to drive right thru. In those days people were not in such a hurry as they are to-day.

The biggest fight came over Keldora's desire to ride Prince Fleetfoot to Nashville and then keep him there "for company," as she expressed it, and to ride about the city for exercise, etc. Mrs. Storm was decidedly against this proposal, for she knew how reckless the girl was; but the Colonel allowed the child would have to have some diversion and something to remind her of home when she got homesick, and as it did not cost much to have a horse cared for in those days of ten-cent corn, he was for yielding this point and letting her have Prince. The Storms had plenty of money anyway, and the father did not consider the cost at all; and neither did the mother care about the cost—her great fear was that the child would come to grief thru her wild and reckless riding. As usual, Keldora carried the day, and it was decided to let her ride Prince and have him kept in Nashville subject to her call.

About the middle of August they all set out for the Tennessee city of schools, religion, politics and booze. The weather was ideal and the trip was one to ever be preserved in Memory's Old Fruit Jar. The Colonel and Mrs. Storm rode in the big and easy family carriage and Keldora galloped or sauntered along on her Prince Fleetfoot. On a few occasions she would get tired and climb in with the old folks and lead Prince behind. Mrs. Storm had carefully packed the girl's wardrobe and other little things to make her comfy, and these were all stored in the rear of the carriage. She even packed in a few jars of their famous Missouri peaches for her pet and darling.

They traveled along at an easy pace and crossed the Mississippi at Cape Girardeau, and then down across Illinois' narrow neck to the historic Ohio at Paducah. Here they rested from Friday even-

ing to Monday morning, as the hotel accommodations were better in a town the size of Paducah. Then they followed along near the Cumberland River up to Nashville, where they arrived Thursday night.

After a good night's rest at the Maxwell House, the Colonel went out and soon found the schools for girls. The oldest one was a seminary and had a good reputation thruout the country for the thoroness of its work and the strictness of its discipline. The rigorous discipline was what particularly appealed to Mrs. Storm, and she insisted on paying the institution a visit first and seeing what kind of a place it appeared to be; so the three of them set out shortly after 10 o'clock that morning and were soon ushered into the office of the institution and asked to be seated and their presence would be announced to the Dean.

"Gee! but I'll bet this is a *cemetery*," shivered Keldora as she glanced about the place and saw only evidence of plainness and severity. Not even a flower or picture—not a blessed thing to indicate that human beings lived there.

"Not *cemetery*, dear, but seminary," carefully corrected Mrs. Storm, and before Keldora could shoot back, the door at the other side of the room quietly opened and a tall and angular woman of about fifty, and with a quiet and dignified air that bordered on haughtiness, entered and made a stiff and slight obeisance, as tho her vertebræ had not been oiled lately and her soul (*if she had any*) had snow on its heather.

"You wished to see the Dean?" she briefly inquired.

"Yes," said the Colonel. "I am Colonel Lexington Storm, of the Ozarks in southern Missouri, and this is Mrs. Storm, and our only dauter, Keldora Storm," and he indicated them as he spoke. He made the introductions in a quiet and dignified way that at once seemed to cause a slight thaw in the Dean's soul. Mrs. Storm and Keldora arose quietly and politely acknowledged the introductions, and then resumed their seats. "We hear good reports of your institution," easily went on the Colonel, "and we have brot our dauter to your academy to see what you can do for the child in the way of polishing a diamond in the ruff," proudly stated the Colonel.

"Yes; that is our business, to finish young ladies and fit them for the highest positions in life, and we shall be pleased to receive Miss Storm and do our best for her. What is the child's age and what schooling has she received?"

"She is fifteen and has only had the advantage of our country

school and the little that Colonel Storm and I have been able to impart," explained Mrs. Storm; "but while she is only a child in years, I think you will find her quite advanced in mind," proudly stated the mother.

"I'm glad of that, for most of our pupils are young ladies much older and they come to us just for the finishing touches and little **m**ental and moral graces so necessary to a finished education," explained the Dean, with a touch of pride that was quite visible.

The institution was shown to the Storms, and the dormitory and its living arrangements for the pupils, etc. The terms were soon arranged and it was decided to leave Keldora for two years—to be polished and *finished*. The Colonel paid the first half-year in advance and arranged to pay all her fees and bills semi-annually, and the Dean was to send him the bills every six months and also a report in regard to her progress, deportment, etc.

Mrs. Storm explained that Keldora was good-hearted, but had been born and reared in a wild and savage country that civilization had scarcely touched yet, and hoped they would bear with her little temperamental idiosyncrasies and hoidenish ways and be as kind with the child as possible. "She can only be managed by *kindness*," explained the mother as she put her arms affectionately around the child's shoulders and caressed her.

"We seldom have any trouble with our wards, but our discipline is strict, tho reasonable, and all our pupils are expected to obey the rules and be studious and attentive," concluded the Dean, with a tone of finality in her voice that would freeze ice cream in August.

The Colonel explained that Keldora had brot her pony with her and was to be allowed to take considerable riding exercise on Sundays and evenings; also she was to be permitted to attend the theater once a week if she so elected.

"We think that a mistake, Colonel Storm; but if you insist on it, it shall be as you wish."

"Of course it's not a mistake," butted in Keldora for the first time, and the flash of pride and defiance in her wonderful eyes made the Dean sit up and blink a little. "After studying all day and all week, one needs a little recreation," went on the child, "and if I couldn't take a ride on Prince and run out into the country and see the birds and inhale the fragrance of the flowers every week, life would be a desert—a world without music and color!" And then she went over and leaned against her father's breast and he put his strong arm around her and kissed her hair.

"Yes, our little Sunbeam is a wild flower and must not be confined and restricted too much," defended the Colonel.

"But, Colonel Storm, the child will have to attend church twice every Sunday and Sunday-school once every Lord's day, and that won't leave much time for riding and mooning about the country," went on the Dean in a surprised and shocked tone of voice; "besides, who's to chaperon her on these horseback excursions and theater-goings?"

"Why, madam, I'm not an invalid nor a baby and I can take care of myself! I'm not a weak and sickly hot-house plant that's always afraid of catching its death o' cold. I was born and raised in the hazy hills of the far-away Ozarks and among the eternal rocks and where the wild bears and catamounts roam at will, and I've shot and killed many a one all by myself when out visiting the big silent trees and helping the little brooks and gurgling mountain streams with their chorus. A *chaperon* indeed! And as for going to church, I reserve the right to choose my *own* cathedral," went on the little Storm in real old Missouri style.

"Oh! then you're a Catholic?" asked the Dean.

"Not a bit of it, madam; my *cathedral* is the eternal hills and laughing brooks that sing their matins to the Great God of Day—the Eternal and Splendid Sun, and I like to wander off myself and help the little birds and flowers with their chorus," explained Keldora, with a dramatic gesture and blazing eyes that boded a storm approaching.

"Why, you little Pagan!" gasped the Dean, with a look of frozen horror on her iced features.

"Call me what you like," defied the girl, "but I'm a STORM, and from *Missouri*, and you can't cram that sky-twaddle down my œsophagus and make me believe it's *religion*!" and she shot the Dean a look that would have settled most anyone; and it did settle the Dean, too, for she hastened to remark:

"I'm afraid that instead of our finishing your daughter, Colonel, she'll *finish* us," and the Dean almost smiled at her little pun; "however, if it is your wish that the child be excused from attendance at divine worship, we'll respect your wishes, for we realize that everyone is free in this country to choose his own religion," parried the Dean, for she realized that the Storms were people of prominence and means, and she wasn't conducting the seminary for her health anyway; so what difference did it make how the girl spent her Sundays, so long as she spent them in such a beautiful and exalted way?

"Weren't the hills and rivers and the rocks and flowers all God's works anyway, and if the little Pagan preferred to worship in this primeval way, what difference did it make?" thought the Dean to herself after they were gone.

"Yes," spoke up Mrs. Storm warmly, "we have never taut Keldora anything like sectarian religion, but have thoroly ingrained into the child's consciousness the necessity of being natural and honest and kind and fair with everyone, and to behave herself and not be selfish. Her wild and natural habitat and its picturesque environment have given the girl a temperamental leaning toward all that's natural and beautiful and refined, and it is our desire that man's artificial religions shall not be *forced* upon her and thus mar her mind and poison her life. If there is anything in your religions that appeals to her reason and that will not shock her acute sense of justice and right, she will undoubtedly be a willing disciple of such a creed. But really, madam, have you *such a creed*?"

"Well—er—that would lead to quite a theological discussion, madam, and I really do not feel at all capable of undertaking it this morning; so, as I stated, the girl shall be free to attend our worship or not just as she elects." And the Dean arose as a signal to indicate that the interview was ended.

The Grim Old Monster had met her Waterloo this time, and at the hands of a fifteen-year-old country girl from the wilds of Missouri. It was best that the matter had thus been brought up and settled, for it was not likely that any of the old fossils who posed as teachers would try to cross swords with the girl on the subject of religion or the theater. Keldora had achieved another victory—had won another race, as she facetiously termed the "scrap" afterward when speaking of it to her parents.

"Well, I should say that child is a *senior* mentally," admitted the Dean to herself after the Storms had departed; "but she surely has the quality and the make-up for a leader—and such oratorical talent and such an easy and graceful manner—like one born to the throne—a wild and uncrowned queen. She is something decidedly new and will be a big favorite with the girls. I do hope that conceited young Baptist minister that spoke at chapel a few mornings ago will meet her and try some of his infallible learning on her. It would be a real treat to see her take the afflatus out of his sails," and the Dean even smiled unto herself at her own musings. The whole world loves a *victor*, and the Dean was no exception, and she freely admitted to herself that the little Missouri Storm was a *Mas-*

ter—a cyclone, in fact; and she secretly liked the girl and decided on a conciliatory course with her. She was aware that the child was a thorobred and had to be treated as such.

As the Storms were in no particular hurry to return home, they lingered in the city a week and visited with a couple of distant relatives of the Colonel's. Then they tearfully and affectionately bade their little Sunbeam good-bye and started on the homeward journey. The first day out they were too sad to enjoy the wild and beautiful country, but after that they enjoyed the trip fully and reached home in ten days; but it did not seem like home now—the light and life of their home had gone out, and all was in gloom and darkness; however, they decided to bear up under the temporary cloud and be as cheerful as possible.

“We still have each other, dear sweetheart,” said the Colonel to his wife, “and we will have to love one another all the more now that our little treasure is gone,” and he gathered Veldena up in his strong arms and gave her such a hugging and kissing as she had not had in many a day; and she fully returned his caresses and sat on his lap that evening and played the guitar in the moonlight, and they both sang with the distant whippoorwills—as in the dear old days of the long ago. When Keldora was at home, she so completely crept in thru their lives they really had little time to love one another; but now they could and *would* have another honeymoon; so on Sundays they took their lunch and fiddle and guitar with them and attended Divine Services together far away in the woods and hills, where the mossy brooks and tangled vines sang alto with the birds and insects. They were both good musicians and sang beautifully together, and these were golden days set in tangled vines and autumn leaves that would come back on Memory's spangled wings and sing alto in their dreams in the mystic and hazy days to come. It was “Veldena” and “Lex” again, and seemed like turning the clock back fifteen years. They wrote Keldora a long and loving letter every week, and received one from her—and sometimes two; and oh, what letters they were—rare masterpieces!

Keldora was dreadfully lonesome at first, but she had a lovely little girl for a room-mate, and they were so congenial and at once became pals and chums. Everyone liked Keldora from the start, and she soon became the favorite of the “Sem.,” as they abbreviated it. Her room-mate was from Arkansas and also had a rather odd name—Zenda Woodbine; and she was also pretty and played and sang quite well. She had brot her violin and banjo with her,

and Keldora had her fine old Stradivarius with her, and the girls sure did have plenty of music. They both played the piano, and Zenda sang a beautiful alto and also a deep and rich contralto. When the girls learned Keldora's unusual name, they dubbed her "*The Missouri Storm*," and they soon discovered that she could storm when the occasion needed bad weather.

CHAPTER XVI.

KELDORA MAKES A HIT.

Autumn is one of Nature's gala seasons in the Southland, and when the autumn leaves are gradually turning to brown and gold and the emerald grass is saying *au revoir* to the insects, it is time for the poet and dreamer to use the Southwind for a Pegasus and outride the horizon. The woods and eternal hills are softly singing to the Harvest Moon, and the lazy birds are dozing and dreaming in the tinted trees in sweet contentment. The cows and sheep idly roam thru the forests and fields in search of the last blades of green grass, and the old crows caw peacefully from tree to tree and tease the busy squirrels as the latter are filling their larders for the cold and wintry days to come. And anon the bobwhite and his day-dreaming cousin, the mystic whippoorwill, try their welcome voices on the soft and hazy air. It is the time to dream and wander—to play with the tangled vines and failing flowers—to gather the ripening nuts and tart wild grapes and try to locate the fox's tentative bark from across the deep ravine. Nature never intended her creatures to remain cooped up in damp and musty old stone and brick buildings at this time of the year, when all Nature was sending out soft-tinted invitations to come and celebrate the feasts of Bacchus and the Sun.

It was such an easy matter for Keldora to get her lessons and keep ahead of the classes that she had plenty of spare time; so she and Prince Fleetfoot were soon a familiar sight about Nashville and its environs. After two weeks together, the two girls had become well acquainted with each other, and as their tastes and ideas were so similar, their friendship exceeded that of Damon and Pythias. Zenda was also a lover of Nature and fine horses, but she had no such wonderful creature as Prince Fleetfoot. However, when Keldora acquainted the proprietor of the livery stable with the fact that her chum needed a good riding-horse that had temperament and was classy, that individual, who was an old Kentuckian and race-track fan, soon found "just what the young lady wanted." He

courteously placed the animal at Zenda's disposal, and the next Sunday the two youngsters set out for a gallop thru the hills and about the countryside. Zenda's mount was a high-strung and 16-cylindereed young mare that certainly had plenty of mettle and what Keldora termed "temperament," and she could surely go some. As soon as the two animals were brot together, they looked each other over critically and then gazed into each other's eyes for a few minutes, and then Prince reached over and gallantly rubbed his aristocratic and disdainful nose against Wingie's nose and began to coo in a soft and friendly way. The little mare seemed perfectly willing to become acquainted with Prince, so she rubbed her dainty and delicate little nose against his snoot and gave a few assenting whinnies, and then they were pals and tillicums. The attachment of these two thorobred animals for one another was strange and beautiful and greatly pleased the girls. They took a banjo and a guitar with them in case they needed music, and after riding around thru the woods and enjoying the soul-enticing beauties of Nature in all her multicolored glory, they dismounted and climbed up in the top of a patriarchal old walnut tree and began to play and sing to the birds and squirrels and other denizens of the woodland; and few animals there be that do not like music. The way Keldora and Zenda could play those instruments and sing in a soft, tawny tone that harmonized perfectly with their autumnal environment!

They soon had an audience other than the little denizens of the forest, for a half-dozen members of a strolling opera company were Sundaying in Nashville, and would open a three-nights engagement at the opera-house the coming week. There were three gentlemen and three ladies in the party, who were doing the woods and renewing their acquaintance with their great ALL-MOTHER, *Mrs. Nature*. They discovered the horses quietly eating grass near the big tree, and at once fell to admiring and caressing the splendid animals, as theatrical people are prone to do. If there's anything that theatrical people like better than a dog or a cold bottle, it's a fine horse or a baby. But what puzzled the singers was the fact that no riders were visible, altho the animals were saddled and bridled and seemed in no hurry to leave, but contentedly cropped the rich green grass and every now and then would rub their noses together in the most friendly and affectionate manner.

"I wonder how these fine animals come to be out here alone and with saddles and bridles on?" mused Signor Voltello, the great Italian tenor.

"Search me," carelessly returned Mlle. Vallens De Senne, the contralto; "but I sure would just love to own this splendid little pony," and she caressingly placed her pretty white arm around Prince's graceful and haughty neck and began to coo and talk baby talk to him, and when he rubbed his soft nose against her cheek and slyly winked at her, her enthusiasm knew no bounds.

Keldora and Zenda were safely out of sight of the intruders, but could plainly discern them from their leafy concealment. Keldora felt a little twinge of jealousy streak thru her nerves at the sight of another caressing her beloved Prince, but, as Prince was something of a beau, he enjoyed it, tho without any feeling of disloyalty to his little mistress. From a few remarks the girls overheard they guessed who the visitors were, and began to play and sing the Prison Song in "*Il Trovatore*," and rendered it in such a classic manner that the troupe were astounded and delighted. The girls, when down town the previous day, had got hold of a program of the coming musical attraction, and in their room that evening they played every number on the program easily; so, just to puzzle the troupe, they played every number on their program, and soon the entire company of six chipped in and helped the girls sing the songs; and the easy manner in which Keldora and Zenda could change from one part to another was a surprise to the troupe. They thot it was some other operatic stars who were passing thru the city and were playing a joke on them; and when they called up to the girls and begged them to come down and introduce themselves, Keldora replied in French and Zenda answered in good Italian, and when the members of the company replied in those languages, the girls came back in German and Spanish. Then the girls, in a spirit of pure mischief, proceeded to serenade them with several of the popular old songs of the Southland and wound up with the immortal "*Dixie*." The troupe did *encore* them and enjoyed the serenade highly; then they begged the girls to come down and show themselves.

"We will come down if you all will go over there behind that clump of trees and stay there and not peep around the sides at us while we are coming down," returned Keldora.

"*Oui, Mademoiselle*," agreed Pierre Millet, the baritone; "*Si, Señorita*," agreed another male member; "*Ja, Fräulein*," returned Signor Voltello, who spoke German fluently. Then they all retired behind the clump of trees and waited breathlessly.

. "All right; now you may appear and apologize for attending

our little rehearsal without an *invitation*," saucily said Keldora, with a smile in her voice that belied her dignified declaration.

"Ah! we beg ze mademoiselles' pardons for being ze intruders," softly apologized the Signor in broken French that was rich and humorous.

"But we were out strolling in the woods and enjoying the beauties of Nature when we discovered your fine horses," put in Mme. De Senne.

"And we never dreamed of being so near two of Nature's greatest nightingales," complimented the soprano, with a mock smile that was too polite to be detected.

"And may we not have the pleasure of knowing your names and who and what you are?" courteously pleaded Mlle. De Senne.

"To be sure, ladies and gentlemen," returned Keldora, with an easy and graceful bow like the poise of a panther; "my friend and chum is Miss Zenda Woodbine, from Arkansas, and I am Miss Keldora Storm, of the Ozarks in southern Missouri. We are students in a girls' seminary here and are trying to put the finishing touches on our educations," explained Keldora in an easy and suave manner, as tho she were a queen and used to all sorts of high-brow ceremonies.

"And incidentally to make those pious old owls up there earn their salaries," chipped in Zenda, with a merry twinkle in her great wild-fawn eyes, with their deep pansy pupils that sparkled and twinkled like zigzag moonlight on the Orinoco River in September.

The troupe all had a hearty laugh at this sally of wit, and voted the girls stars of the first magnitude, and asked them what their ambitions were. They had no particular plans for the future except to get all the education they could and enjoy life. The troupe expressed their delight at meeting the girls and they all had a delightful little visit together, and then the actors gave the girls complimentary tickets to all their performances and thanked them for the rare serenade, and hoped to have the pleasure of meeting them again.

Then Keldora and Zenda mounted their horses and happily sauntered away thru the sylvan woods farther to the south, and just as the sun was setting in the occidental clouds they turned their horses' heads toward home and for about a mile pulled off a real horse-race to see which was the faster—Prince or Wingie. It was nip and tuck all the way, but Keldora always declared that Prince was too gallant to outrun his little pal and sweetheart, and it did seem that way, too. Yes, Prince and Wingie became *sweet-*

hearts as well as pals, and were restless and unhappy when apart, but would smile and rub their noses together whenever they were brot in proximity to one another. Keldora declared that horses and other animals could love and be sweethearts as well as humans could, and she was a connoisseur of everything pertaining to horses; and Zenda was of the same opinion.

The girls told the liveryman that the little mare was a darling, and asked if she was for sale.

"Well, yes; I would sell her to you girls, for I know you would never abuse her," returned the man after some hesitation, and then he wiped away an intruding tear and looked embarrassed. "The fact is, I bought the mare when a colt and raised her up and trained her for my only dauter, and since Lennie died I've never had the heart to part with her, for she is such a spoiled little pet and is so used to having her own way," went on the ruff old man, and the tears just would not be restrained.

"Oh, we're so sorry!" exclaimed both girls at the same time.

"It is so hard to lose the ones you love," said Keldora, with all her heart and sympathy in her wonderful voice, and at the same time wiped away his tears with her kel—handkerchief. This simple act of kindness touched the old man's heart and caused the flowers to bloom again in his soul.

"She's a fine nag and has the best of stock in her, and you may have her for seventy-five dollars, tho she is really worth much more," declared the old man.

"All right; I'll take her at that figure, but I haven't all the money at present," admitted Zenda; "but I can save some out of my expense money and in that way I can soon pay for her."

"And I'll help you to pay for her, dear," chipped in Keldora, like a real little sport.

"I can pay you thirty-five dollars now," said Zenda.

"And I can spare twenty-five dollars," said Keldora.

"So that will only leave fifteen dollars due on the nag," counted up the girls.

"That's all right, children; but don't rob yourselves too close, for I am in no particular need of the money just now," assured the kind-hearted old man.

So the deal was closed and Zenda was the happiest girl in Tennessee, for now she could ride with Keldora when she liked, and on her *own* "haws," too. She had a big cargo of the old Southern

pride, just as Keldora had, and she liked to *own* her mount. And they arranged with the liveryman to keep Prince and Wingie in the same big stall, so they could talk and love each other to their hearts' content.

That was a banner day all around—the strange meeting with the “show” people and the serenade and little chat and the theater tickets; and then the purchase of the dear little mare for Zenda and the providing of Prince with a *sweetheart*. Events were crowding into her life rapidly.

“I wonder what will be our next adventure?” asked Keldora of Zenda when they got back to their quarters and had reviewed the day's victories.

“I hope it will be something full of pep and beautiful,” exclaimed the Arkansaw Traveler with fervor, “for I like the unusual things best. But won't the old Dean be furious when she learns of our escapade to-day?” went on Zenda in a reminiscent tone.

“But how will she ever learn of our strange escapade?” asked Keldora in an amused tone of voice. “Besides, there was no harm in it anyway, and those people were just as nice as the Dean or anybody I ever met,” argued Keldora, more to herself than to Zenda.

“Oh! she'll find it out in some way—don't you ever fear that she won't. ‘The Devil is always good to his own,’” quoted Zenda.

And sure enuff, on the following day the evening paper had a vivid and lurid account of the whole affair, with many artistic trimmings that were gratuitous and supplemental. When the Dean and Faculty read it, there were visible signs of a storm for those two girls; but as Keldora was a *Storm* herself, she didn't mind little squalls. Zenda had never had anything but good marks from her instructors, and now it looked as tho her deportment were doomed to have a brunet mark stamped on it. Keldora quieted her fears, and told her to sit tight, and if the Dean tried to rock the boat, she would cloud up and storm all over her; besides, they both had excellent mounts now, and if they were expelled, they could ride home together, and as Zenda had promised to go home with Keldora and make a long visit, they would all go up to the Springfield Fair again some time and have a real live time.

After chapel exercises Tuesday morning, the Dean quietly invited both girls to wait in her office, as she wanted to see them privately. “The squall is coming I guess,” admitted Keldora, with a shrug. The Dean came in quietly and with a frigid look on her face handed the paper to Keldora and asked her to read it aloud,

so her friend might have a chance to hear it. Keldora read it with a great deal of gusto and elocutionary effect, and then both girls laughed heartily at it and asked the Dean what she thought of it.

"It is scandalous!" thundered the head of the "Sem.," "and such conduct on the part of our pupils will ruin the Institution," went on the Dean in a Klondyke tone of voice. "To think of a couple of well-reared young ladies meeting such awful things as actors away out in the woods unattended!" went on the iced voice in a frozen manner.

"Madam," icily returned Keldora as she arose and walked up in front of her accuser and traducer, "your statement of the case is neither fair nor truthful and is very unbecoming a great teacher and professed follower of the meek and lowly Nazarene, who taught forgiveness and who said, 'Judge not, lest ye be judged,'" quoted Keldora, with a mischievous twinkle in her beautiful starry eyes. "Besides, the paper has greatly exaggerated the whole affair and made many misstatements. The meeting was wholly accidental, and there were three ladies in the party, one of whom was a married woman, and her young daughter was with them. We had no way of knowing that we would be discovered when we rode away into the woods and ascended that giant tree and started to serenade our little feral friends, the birds; and anyway it is no crime to meet your own species accidentally, and those actors and actresses were the nicest and politest people I ever met, and they evidently never 'finished' in this Institution!" And the girl's eyes were now glowing like twin volcanoes that were eating fixed stars for dessert.

"Miss Storm! how dare you to make such an insinuating remark about our sacred Institution?"

"Yes, I guess it is *sacred*, but not to the truth," flashed Keldora right back at the Dean, who was purpling with a choking rage.

"Go to your rooms at once, and I'll see that the paper makes a correction," ordered the baffled woman, for she was no match for Keldora when it came to slinging the English language.

"And you had better be careful what you say about those actors, or you will have a libel suit on your hands," fired Keldora as a parting shot and just for good measure.

"I have a legal adviser, Miss Storm," and the Dean went out the other door with her pride at half-mast.

When the Dean learned that both girls were preparing to attend the opera, she put her foot down on it and there were sand-burs between every toe; in fact, she positively forbade it. "For

your attendance at their performances now, after the scandalous article, which they no doubt inspired, would be an acknowledgment that our Institution indorses them and their wicked shows of indecency and depravity," stormed the irate Dean.

"You don't know that they had anything to do with the newspaper story, and neither do you know aught against their characters; besides, the cream and *élite* of the city will be there in all their glory; and not to attend after their kindness and courtesy in extending us tickets and our promise to attend would be a serious breach of etiquette and honor, and I am sure you do not want them to carry the impression away with them that etiquette and honor are not on the curriculum of this INSTITUTION," sarcastically and facetiously returned Keldora. "Besides, my parents always taut me to be polite and never break my word after once given. That is a family trait of all our people on both sides."

"And I agree with you, dear," quietly asserted Zenda, with a flash of defiance in both eyes. "And if you will lay aside your inherited prejudices and come with Keldora and me, we will gladly pay for your ticket," continued the little Arkansas flower, addressing the Dean, with a tone of finality in her voice.

"No, thank you, Miss Woodbine; I could not so far forget my dignity and Christian training as to attend a theater," declined the Dean, with a stiff bow and a frigid sneer.

"So is an owl and a fence-post long on *dignity*, but fortunately they never had any *Christian* training or '*finishing*' in a seminary," handed out Keldora as a sort of finishing upper-cut that tossed the Old Lady over on *Quiet Avenue*.

The girls dolled themselves up in their prettiest rags and, armed with a pair of gold-mounted opera-glasses and a pair of bright and winning smiles, hiked out for the theater. They were a little early, and found Signor Voltello near the door and evidently waiting for them.

"*Ah! buenas tardes, Señoritas,*" greeted the Signor in perfect Spanish.

"Good evening, Signor Voltello. Are we ahead of time?" saluted the girls.

"Just in time, *Signorinas*; and I have reserved a lower box for you, as a slight token of our appreciation of the leafy serenade you so kindly accorded us last Sunday," returned the Signor; and they all laughed heartily at this little pleasantry.

Signor Voltello then escorted them to their box and asked per-

mission to introduce other members of the opera company to them.

"We should be delighted to meet your people," courteously assented both girls in the same sentence.

The Signor then excused himself and left them; presently he returned with three other members and duly presented them. The leading man, Señor Dalles Santos, expressed a desire to hear them play and sing, and after a little parley, the girls consented to meet the company in the parlors of the Maxwell House and sing for them. Then four more members came in and were duly presented to the girls. They were holding quite a levee, and many glasses were leveled at them from all parts of the pit and the other boxes. The compliments and flattering attentions the girls were receiving from the opera company were very sweet to their young and inexperienced minds, and their faces were radiant with joy, when lo and behold—the Dean and another of the instructors were sitting down in the pit about midway, and with a look of frozen horror on their pallid and icy faces! They had arrived just in time to witness the little levee in the girls' box, and were horrified at the notoriety they were achieving, and in dreadful fear that it might put a *stain* on the INSTITUTION! That Institution surely was something *sacred*, but the Dean could never prove it by Keldora and Zenda.

When the curtain went down on the first act, the manager of the theater came in the box and informed the girls that the Governor and his wife and daughter and two other wealthy and prominent ladies wished to see Miss Storm and Miss Woodbine.

"We shall be pleased to meet our chief executive and his family and the other ladies who seek our acquaintance," sweetly assented Keldora, with just a proper touch of that womanly dignity which is pleasing without being repelling.

The manager ushered the Governor and his wife and daughter in and introduced them, and then presented the other ladies. The girls received their distinguished visitors with such well-bred dignity and gentle breeding that they at once carried the day, and they received invitations to dine at the executive mansion and at the homes of the other women. When the Dean and her ice-faced pal witnessed this remarkable social triumph and victory, their faces bloomed like morning glories burgeoning in the sun after an early morning rain. And oh, boy! the glad dope the papers handed out to our young sheroes and the big front-page story about their social triumph at the Governor's reception! From that on they were the

Irest kind of ITTTTTTTTTSSSSSSSSSS!!!!!!! and the poor old icy-faced Dean couldn't do enuff for them nor be nice enuff.

On the next afternoon Keldora and Zenda met the entire opera company at the Maxwell House, and played and sang for them. The company were delighted and applauded them to the limit. They had never met such unusual talent in such young girls, and they predicted all sorts of good things for their future. They invited the girls to dine with them that evening, and it was a swell little dinner that would always be a green spot in their memories. The next afternoon the girls and eight members of the company went out for a ride in the woods and around Nashville. They were all well mounted, and on the return trip the Signor challenged Keldora for a race, and she promptly accepted, and three members of the company acted as starters and the other five and Zenda were the judges.

The Signor had a fine mount—a tall and rangy animal that was nervous and full of pep and that had a chassis along the lines of a greyhound, a jackrabbit and a streak of lightning, and most anyone would have picked him for a winner. The singer felt sure that he could put one over on the little Missourian and get a laff at her expense, but he didn't know the Ozark product very well.

One of the singers stood between the animals and held them by the bridles, and at the word "Go!" the horses both sprang forward with a leap and began to devour the mile of space with all-fours. For the first half-mile the Signor had quite the best of it, and then Keldora said some *Mysterious Words* to Prince and that seemed to wing his feet, for he let himself out and won the race by more than 100 feet.

"Fine! Splendid!" exclaimed the judges, and then they began to josh the Signor and pet Prince and flatter Keldora for her equestrianism.

After letting the animals cool off a bit, they all rode back to the city and the girls returned to the "Sem.," but not to study—oh, no! The other students had to know all about it, and Keldora and Zenda were perfectly willing to tell them. They never tired of listening to Keldora, for she was such a mimic and elocutionist it was a pleasure to listen to her narratives. The girl had dramatic talent to a high degree, but no ambition to go on the stage.

That night they occupied the same box again and were the targets for all eyes, and received many floral bouquets and requests for introductions. After the first act, the audience rose *en masse*

and demanded that "Miss Storm" sing for them while they were waiting for the next act, and they simply would not be denied, either. The Signor and the manager of the house and Madame De Senne all came into their box and begged the girl to sing for the audience, for such cordial applause was a compliment that could not be ignored.

"All right; I'll sing them one of my own little songs that I composed out in the Ozarks," finally said Keldora; and then, to the utter astonishment of the audience and everyone else, she made a little run and a big jump that landed her away out on the stage. This remarkable and panther-like leap was done so gracefully and easily that it brot out tremendous applause. Keldora stepped to the wings and asked for a banjo, which was handed to her, and then she tripped out on the stage and signaled the orchestra to be silent; then she played a little prelude and began her song:

"O pretty birds, come sing with me,
Come down from your leafy trees;
Just help me with my songs and we
Will enrich the summer breeze."

There were three more stanzas to this pretty little elfin song, and she sang and acted it with such feeling and pathos the audience went wild and cheered and applauded until she came back and played a solo that charmed them into a perfect storm of applause--and it was one of her *own* compositions, too. The Governor rose in his box and personally thanked Keldora for the audience and paid her a beautiful compliment, and also lauded the Ozarks that produced such talent. Then he asked her where the song might be procured, and she informed him that it was just one of her own little songs she composed while out in the woods and hills one afternoon, and that it had never been published. Then when the audience realized that she was also a composer, they resumed the applause, and all those who had flowers with them threw them into her box. After the next act, the Signor and several members of the company came to the box and begged Keldora to set her songs to music and have them published, "so the whole world may have the pleasure of singing and playing them, Mademoiselle." She promised that she would see about it when she had the time.

Many prominent ladies and gentlemen in the audience sought introductions to the girls, but they begged to be excused that night. When the performance was over, the entire audience sought their

box and insisted on shaking hands with them and complimenting Keldora and Zenda; so the girls held quite a levee again and received many invitations to dine with prominent people; but they declared that they were there to finish their educations, and that they were too young to enter society.

The next day the Governor and his wife called at the "Sem." and asked the girls to go driving with them Saturday afternoon and meet some of their friends. Keldora was on the point of politely declining, but the Dean smilingly urged them to accept the invitations, as "the Governor and his family are not subject to the rules of the Institution." That settled it, and the girls accepted and enjoyed a fine ride in the Governor's magnificent equipage, with liveried servants to wait on them.

"Miss Storm," ardently began the Governor, who was a true Southerner and a judge of horse-flesh, "that off nag there can go some and I'm going to enter her at the fair this fall, and I'll see that you all get to attend," courteously and warmly said the Governor, with a touch of justifiable pride.

"I'll bet my Prince can outrun her," roguishly exclaimed Keldora, with a mischievous smile at the chief executive.

"I accept your challenge, Miss Storm, and my nephew shall ride the mare. He is a son of my only sister and is sixteen, but rather small for his age; in fact, just the right size for a jockey."

Then they all laughed at the idea of the Governor and Keldora running a horse-race.

"Why, my dear, it would never do for you to do such a boyish thing as to run a horse-race with a school-girl!" exclaimed his wife.

"But she challenged papa," put in the Governor's daughter, "and you know that he could never look his friends in the face again if he took a dare from a school-girl," and then they all laughed again. "And the papers and the politicians would never get thru rubbing it in on papa if he backed down," continued the daughter.

"Why, mother, I'd simply have to resign and move to *Arkansaw* if I let a Missourian put me to shame like that." "No sir-ee, the thing is settled—that race shall be run, Miss Storm, if I have to ride it myself." And the Governor gave his wife a look that adjourned the discussion *sine die*.

The Governor had recently imported the mare from a famous Kentucky stable near Lexington, and the animal had a genealogy that would put the oldest Knickerbocker family on Staten Island in the shades of the parvenus. The news soon leaked out and the

papers played it up with four-inch type and featured it in their Sunday editions. The great State Fair and Southern Exposition was only ten days off, and this race was the talk of the town and surrounding country; even the Louisville and Memphis and Atlanta and New Orleans papers got the story and featured it; and the betting was lively, but after the sports and race-track fans had seen the Governor's mare and learned of her pedigree, the betting turned in favor of the Governor; but Keldora had made such tremendous hits and so many friends that many of the younger and more chivalrous ones were perfectly willing to lose money on her horse rather than bet against their sweet-singer guest.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BIG FAIR AND SENSATIONAL HORSE-RACE.

The time for the big fair finally rolled around, the last week in October, and the weather was ideal; in fact, all Nature as well as Tennessee and Kentucky seemed bent on attending and providing the proper conditions, for the news had spread everywhere, and such a crowd Old Nashville had never seen before. This fair in those days was always the biggest event in the Southland except the Louisville races and the New Orleans Mardi-Gras, and this time it was destined to put those record-breakers over in the tin-horn class. Thursday was Nashville Day and also Tennessee Day, and the city was a wilderness of flags, bunting, banners and flowers—a gala day indeed, and one to ever be remembered, for it was the only case on record where a governor of one of our great sovereign States and a mere slip of a Missouri school-girl ran a horse-race. Several packets ran special excursions from St. Louis, Cairo and Paducah, in order that the people might enjoy the unusual spectacle of a governor and a school-girl running a horse-race. The Dean and all the instructors attended *en masse*, and on that day the schools were all dismissed, so the pupils might attend and enjoy the festivities.

The Dean engaged seats for her teachers and the whole class (84) in one section of the grand-stand, so the teachers could act as chaperons for the girls in their care. Three of the girls remained with Keldora and Zenda and to help Keldora get ready and get Prince in trim. Keldora and Zenda had been out in the country almost every day the past week in order to exercise Prince and get him in condition, for Keldora had just determined to win that race or go home in disgrace; and the Governor just had to win it or ever

after be the butt of all the joke-smiths as well as his political enemies. "There can't be no such thing as losing this race," admitted the Governor to himself. His wife still berated him for accepting a child's innocent challenge, and tried to make him see that his position forbade such an exhibition of himself, but the Governor was a true sport and stuck to his colors.

This race was put at the end of the program, and everyone was on the *qui vive* and keyed up to high C—and then a few octaves higher.

The Governor at once put his mare in the hands of expert trainers, and she was a beauty and in fine trim, while poor little Prince Fleetfoot looked rather pudgy and more like a Brownie or a joke.

When Keldora and Zenda came riding up on their mounts and announced that Keldora was ready, the Governor and judges asked:

"Miss Storm, who is going to ride for you?"

"Why, I'm going to attend to that little affair myself," saucily and pleasantly returned Keldora; and then she deliberately turned to the Governor and naively remarked: "Excuse me, Governor, but we have not yet laid any bets on our horses, and a horse-race without a little coin wagered on it would be contrary to all traditions and rather a colorless affair, eh?" and she turned the full glory of her splendid Ozark eyes full on her antagonist and looked him steadily in the eye in a dare-devil manner that would have made any race-track gambler turn green with envy.

"That's so," rather sheepishly admitted the Governor, for he really did not want to win the girl's money—just wanted to save himself from the sneers and butts of ridicule if he backed down.

"Does Miss Storm wish to wager any money on her horse?" politely and kindly inquired the chief executive, with an embarrassed smile.

"To be sure I do," promptly returned Keldora as she reached for her purse. "I'll wager an even hundred that I win the race," and she fished out five twenties and handed them to the judges.

"And I'd like to place a thousand on the young lady and her nag," quietly asserted a tall and distinguished-looking middle-aged gentleman, who was dressed in the latest fashion and who bore every mark of an educated gentleman of wealth and high position.

The Governor looked around and held out his hand to his new challenger, and said.

"Why, howdy do, Colonel Bragston? I didn't know that you were here."

"Oh, yes; I came down on purpose to see this remarkable race and to win a little easy pin-money from an old friend and school-mate—like I used to when we were youngsters at college, eh, Governor?" teased his friend.

The Governor was plainly flustered, for his challenger was a member of the Supreme Court of a naboring State, and a man of ample wealth to indulge any little whim like betting on a horse-race. The Governor was also a man of large means, and couldn't ignore a public challenge like that—and especially as it was made in the presence of the judges and Miss Storm; so he promptly covered the Colonel's bet and passed his gold-mounted cigar-case to that legal light. They smoked and chatted easily together while the jockeys and trainers were getting Firefly (*the Governor's nag*) ready.

"By the way, Governor, *who* is the remarkable girl that you are all going crazy about?" asked the Colonel in an easy and indifferent way.

She is a product of southern Missouri, and her father is Colonel Lexington Storm, of Kentucky, and her mother comes from a proud old family of Mississippi, and she's a rare genius in so many ways she keeps us all guessing where she'll break out next. Of course she challenged me just in a bantering spirit of mischief when she found me bragging on my mare, and before I realized what I was saying I accepted her challenge, and the little hoiden and daredevil seemed tickled to death to think that she had trapped me into such a ridiculous position," explained the Governor. "But, of course, I shall return the money immediately the race is over," went on the Governor in a satisfied manner, as tho he knew he would win.

"Yes, that will be the proper thing to do," sarcastically smiled the jurist. "But, of course, I won't get mine back," continued the Colonel in that ironical way of his that made the Governor smile with delight, for he was only too glad of a chance to win back some of the money he had lost to the Colonel on college poker games.

"Indeed you won't, you old pirate!" and the Governor slapped his old friend on the back and smiled sarcastically.

"Excuse me, miss, but surely you're not betting perfectly good money on that dumpy little Brownie?" facetiously inquired a handsome and well-clad gentleman, who had just come up and had been told how matters were going.

"I sure am, Mr.—er—"

"I beg pardon, miss, but my name is Harold Jackson and I hail from Cincinnati and practice law a little when I'm not traveling or following the ponies," easily explained the gentleman, with a graceful lift of his fashionable hat that indicated that he was educated and cultured.

"Glad to meet anyone from the *horse-collar State*," sarcastically bowed Keldora in acknowledgment of his auto-introduction, "and I have a loose hundred here *that the judges are just itching to get their hands on*," and she nonchalantly tossed two crisp new fifties to the judges amidst a storm of laughter at the stranger's expense. He blushed a little in spite of his profession, and then fished out a hundred in tens and handed it to the judges.

"You're certainly game, little girl," admiringly admitted Mr. Jackson, "and as you're from *Missouri*, I presume you'll show us whether or not that little Pegasus can go some," pleasantly continued the gentleman from Cincinnati.

"I'm something of a demonstrator, Mr. Jackson, and may possibly be able to gratify your curiosity," returned Keldora in a fine tone of irony that would cut diamonds.

"And I have a stray fifty dollars I'd like to wager on my chum's '*Brownie*,'" sarcastically announced Zenda, with a malicious look at the well-dressed gentleman from the North.

"I'll take it, miss," announced a dinky little cuss who looked like a barber, and he flashed out two twenties and a ten gold-piece and handed them with his name to the judges. Zenda quickly covered his money and then hurried back to her chum.

"I'd like to place a hundred on the Governor's nag," leeringly announced a swaggering big bully, who looked like a steamboat roustabout or a stevedore, and he looked challengingly at the girls.

"I haven't that amount of money," quietly admitted Zenda, "but I'll wager my mare here that the Governor's nag is a slow train," flashed back Zenda at him, and her eyes snapped like the jaws of an Arkansas bob-cat when it jumps for a dog.

The big ruffneck looked the mare over critically and then 'lowed "she wor wuth that smol ermount"; so he paid over his hundred to the judges and Zenda led her mare over to them and they accepted her *in lieu* of the money. "Gee! but ther little one's game all right," he said, and gave Zenda an admiring smile that he meant for a compliment.

Just then a trainer came up and announced that Firefly was ready and inquired if the "little gal from Ol' Mizzuri" was

ready. She was ready and her eyes flashed like a Borneo volcano having an epileptic fit. The race was to be a mile dash and it would take just two laps around the track to make it.

The animals were ridden out in front of the grand-stand and were permitted to prance and caper around for about twenty minutes, so that all could see them and thus decide whichway they wished to bet. Even the Dean was just itching to risk a fifty on the race, but her dignity and religious scruples and position as head of the "Sem." forbade it; so she just sat tight and grinned. She also wore a bit of purple at her throat on this unusual occasion, and it was the first time she had departed from the eternal plain and severe black which she always wore.

The betting was lively, with the odds slightly in favor of the Governor's nag, for she was built on the traditional lines of the racer, while Keldora's animal did resemble a fat and dumpy little Brownie.

One of the judges led the animals up to a line by their bridles and explained that when he said "Go!" they were to let them out and skedaddle for all they were worth. The animals were restive of all restraint and wanted to be off. The jockey on the Governor's mare was evidently nervous and considerably rattled, but Keldora calmly sat her steed like a Gipsy queen that was born in the saddle and lived in a stable. She was all smiles and saucily threw kisses to the vast assemblage in the grand-stand, and this brot out a roar of applause that could be heard to Chattanooga or Memphis. Finally the word was given, and the splendid animals leaped forward with such speed the jockey was almost unseated, but the mare knew her business all right and would have done better without him. Keldora was calm and leaned gracefully forward and patted Prince on his neck and simply whispered, "Go, boy mine!" and he went, too. He had an antagonist worthy of his steel, for Firefly was a fine animal and could surely go. They kept neck and neck up to the first quarter, and then up to the half post Prince lost a little ground and was a full length behind Firefly. At the three-quarter post he had regained about 3 feet, but lost it again before they reached the quarter on the second lap, and at the half he was fully two lengths to the bad and still seemed to be losing. The fans were either yelling or groaning, according to which side their money and sympathies were on. Keldora now leaned over and whispered that *Strange Something* in Prince's little ears and he sprang forward like magic and at the three-quarter he was a neck

ahead and gaining rapidly, and then Keldora let out the old Missouri yell and Prince seemed to change into a bird with 16-cylinder wings, and sailed under the wire about six lengths of himself ahead of the Governor's nag.

Such a roar and babble of incoherent yells that went up from everywhere was enuff to turn almost any head—young or old—but Keldora and Zenda took it all stoically and did not get a bit excited. The men rushed up to Prince and placed Keldora on their shoulders and carried her up and down in front of the judges' stand a half-dozen times before they let her get back to her beloved Prince. Such an ovation no one had ever before received in Nashville.

"Now, Governor, be sure and return the kid's money," was the sarcastic shot the Judge fired at his old friend as he drifted away to get something to steady his nerves. He instructed the judges to pay the one thousand dollars he had won from the Governor to Keldora, "for she and her wonderful pony did all the work and are really entitled to it." Then two thousand eight hundred dollars more that Prince had won for those who bet on him was turned over to the "brave little gal from Missouri," as most of the men termed her.

The Governor congratulated the girls and insisted that he was going to give a big Thanksgiving dinner and reception to the *élite* and extended a cordial invitation to both girls, as he wished them to be the special guests of honor. The Governor was game and didn't mind what he lost to Keldora, but the parting shot the Judge gave him was what got his *Nancy Animal*. Anyway, the people could never accuse him of backing down from a school-girl, and that was worth several times the pittance he lost. As we do not know how the Governor's wife rubbed it in on him when they got home and were alone, we won't try to tell it on him; besides, you married men can easily guess it anyway.

Keldora only had about twenty thousand offers to buy Prince at figures ranging all the way from fifteen hundred dollars to fifteen thousand dollars, but she was loyal and would not part with him for the world. He was a friend, a companion, a chum, a pal, and a *gold-mine* all rolled into one—and then some. He was her railroad and automobile and street car. Just what were the *Mysterious Words* that she always whispered in his ears at the psychological moment and when a crisis was imminent she would never divulge—so I cannot tell you, but they always had the desired effect and won the day for her. It is my opinion, however, that the

pony was a fine subject for *hypnosis*, and her mystic words immediately threw him into a state of complete hypnosis and then his legs and muscles passed under the control of his *subconscious* mind, and that mysterious dynamo gave additional strength and velocity.

The girls pleasantly declined to ride home with the Governor, but deftly mounted their steeds, after collecting the money they won and that was left for them by others who had won it on the pony, and cantered back to town and then rode around the city for an hour and then put up their horses and returned to the "Sem.," where the whole class and most of the teachers were waiting to congratulate them and squeeze them. They were ITR, but took it all modestly and quietly and thanked them all for their kind words and praise; then they hurried to their room to count their winnings. Keldora's amounted to just four thousand dollars and Zenda's to one hundred and fifty dollars. "A pretty good day's work, dear!" cried Zenda, and she gathered Keldora up in her arms and proceeded to love her to death. Keldora insisted on dividing her winnings with Zenda, but the little Arkansawyer would not accept it. Zenda was the same age as Keldora, lacking five days, and they were inseparable and grew fonder of each other every day. That night and the next they wrote long accounts of it to their parents, and Zenda's mother was in for bringing the child right home, but her dad "lowed the kid was doin' right smart well." Keldora's parents rejoiced in her successes and were sorry she wasn't *twins*. The good stock in her along with the right kind of ideas were bearing fruit of the desirable kind, and they were very proud and happy and filled with a great longing to see their only child again. Their new honeymoon since left alone was bringing back all the old flowers and many new ones.

The girls attended the Governor's Thanksgiving reception and were his guests of honor and scored many new triumphs and met many of the *élite* of the city. The Governor's nephew, who rode as a jockey on that memorable day, when formally introduced to the girls, was so embarrassed and rattled that he stammered a few polite commonplaces and then beat a hasty retreat. The girls really wanted to talk to him and be real nice to him, but all his school-mates and friends had rubbed it in on him so unmercifully for letting a little school-girl outrun him in a horse-race that he didn't have the nerve to face the music. At the dinner the Governor's wife tried to arrange it so Paul would sit beside Keldora, but the young cub just couldn't be caught in any such trap as that. At this din-

ner the girls sang and rendered some rare selections, but some of the little wood-songs they composed themselves made the greatest hit with their distinguished audience, and Keldora just had to repeat her little ode to the Ozark birds three times before they would be satisfied. She invited the Governor and his family to visit her and her parents in their "*Dreamland Home*" out in the dear old Ozarks, "And then I'll take you out to the wonderful little temple of trees and tangled vines and wild flowers where I composed that little song and others, for I can always sing so much better when on Nature's stage," she tossed to her host and hostess as she was taking her leave of them.

"We shall be delighted to come and visit you all and meet your parents," exclaimed the Governor and his wife and daughter, "for we are curious to see the soil and environment that produce such rare and charming products," gallantly went on the Governor. "And when we take our vacation next summer you may expect us," added the Governor's wife.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KELDORA MEETS A MINISTER AND A BURGLAR.

The papers were full of the Governor's Thanksgiving dinner and reception and for the first time had a fairly good picture of Keldora and a vivid account of her wonderful voice and musical talents, and concluded their story by handing the Governor a little friendly tip to never bet on "hoss"-races any more. They also finally prevailed on Keldora to let them publish some of her poems and songs, and these were copied widely by the press and highly praised.

The girls were very happy now and everything at the "Sem." just hummed, and the Dean occasionally had a bouquet of flowers on her desk—and also so far forgot her "*dignity and religious training*" as to wear just a speck of color at her throat and to attend a few of the better attractions at the theaters; in fact, she was developing a few mild symptoms of humanity and gave some slight promise of becoming civilized instead of fossilized. The pupils all noted the change for the better in all of the teachers, and hailed it with gladness.

Keldora and Zenda rode out and around whenever the weather was favorable and applied themselves studiously to their studies and music; and since meeting the Governor and so many people who were prominent politically, Keldora and Zenda became quite

interested in Civil Government and Political Economy; and it didn't take them long to detect the camouflage and hypocrisy in these things. Camouflage and hypocrisy had small chance to get by these two critical guards. When they were satisfied that a thing was wrong or in error, they didn't hesitate to say so, and it mattered not at all how many were the "*authorities*" championing a wrong or an error. Keldora had been taught from infancy to only accept *Reason* and *Truth* as her authority; hence she had many conflicts with her pious and stupid teachers on this point. What if St. Paul did deny women the right to speak in church? "Where did the ancient gentleman get the right to deny others the rights he claimed for *himself*?" asked Keldora of a prominent divine who tried to inculcate that barbarous and monstrous idea at chapel one morning. "And *why* should *women* be denied any rights that men enjoy? Aren't we women human beings, and don't we do more than half the work of the world and about three-fourths of the suffering?" went on the little Missourian.

"But, my child, the 'Good Book' says so and it was written by *inspired men*," mildly countered the Reverend.

"Inspired fiddlesticks!" retorted Keldora, with a fine vein of irony. "If they were *inspired*, why did they make so many mistakes and write so many stupid and foolish things? Your St. Paul was such a devil of a *saint* he never got married—probably couldn't find any woman fool enough to marry a man who was so lost to all sense of decency and fairness as to deny the woman who bore him the right of free speech. A grouchy old bachelor with a sand-bur in his mean and dinky little soul! The idea of that old hill-billy presuming to judge half the human race and prescribe rules for our conduct! Besides, your beloved Christ said: 'Judge not, lest ye be judged,' and yet this old solitaire bachelor flies right in the face of his professed teacher and master by pronouncing judgment on my sex, and without even giving us a chance to be heard in *our own defense*. Why, even the law gives everyone the right to defend him or herself, and even a judge in pronouncing sentence on a condemned criminal always politely asks the poor devil if he has anything to say or any reason why sentence should not be pronounced on him; and yet here is this insufferable person who calmly pronounces judgment on half the human race, and all because *we* happened to be *women*; and he even goes on and prescribes how we should *dress*. Just think of an old bach coming up here to the 'Sem.' and telling us all what to wear and when to take our hats

off and when to keep them on! Oh, but wouldn't I like to meet the conceited mortal and take the afflatus out of his sails!" and her eyes were glowing like a panther's just as it is ready to spring at an enemy.

"Miss Storm, you seem to have some very advanced and radical ideas in regard to the teachings of St. Paul, and you are the first real *Suffrajete* I ever met; however, we'll not have time to discuss the matter at present, but I may call on you at some more propitious time and try to show you the error of your ways," gracefully returned the Reverend.

"I'm always open to convictions, Reverend Tellus, and anytime you care to cross swords with me, I'm ready for the mental battle—or a horse-race, either."

This last sally brought down a big laugh at the Reverend's expense, for he had openly in his church denounced horse-racing as a "deadly sin."

"I'm afraid the reverend gentleman is like the fellow down in my State who grabbed a wildcat—he was ready to let go long before the cat was," fired Zenda at the Reverend as he was preparing to leave the rostrum.

This witticism fired in Zenda's fine irony delighted the girls and even brought a smile to the faces of some of the teachers. This is how Keldora became known as "*The Suffrajete*," and the title always clung to her. She rapidly developed into a *Suff. militant*, and was the champion of her sex and the equal rights of all human beings; and Zenda was her lieutenant, and a fearless one too. Most of the girls became broadened and liberalized on account of Keldora and her rationalism and brave defense of it. The old fossils who knew her and her abilities refused to cross swords with her.

The Dean had a secret sense of humor concealed about her some place, for she had long tried to bring that "conceited young Baptist minister" and Keldora together without appearing to do so, and at last she almost succeeded; but the Reverend Tellus got wind of the slyly arranged bout and tipped it off to his younger brother of the cloth, and the little coward backed down and sent an excuse that a dying parishioner had sent for him at that particular time and just when he was ready to start to the "Sem." "to correct the young lady (*Keldora*) in her erroneous ideas of the Bible and set her right." So the poor old Dean and her pupils missed a rare piece of sport.

"We'd have eaten him alive, dear," mused Zenda to Keldora when they were alone that evening.

"The poor little sky-gazer wouldn't have been enuff for the first course," laffed Keldora in return.

Things ran along smoothly and in the usual routine rut until the 22d of April, when a burglar forced his way into the "Sem." about 2 a. m. and proceeded from room to room and was collecting quite a lot of loot from the girls and teachers when one of the teachers woke up with a start at finding a man in her room who was going calmly thru her things and collecting everything valuable. She was so dumbfounded and startled that she was speechless for a while, and then she let out a series of feminine screams and shrieks that soon awoke the entire bunch.

"Help! Murder! Fire! O God, save us!" shrieked this pious old lady, who was about fifty-five and who always trusted in "Divine Providence." Divine Providence was evidently off duty that night, for he came not to her rescue, as a thoroly reliable and properly trained D. P. should have done. He didn't even send a proxy. Almost any old thing in the way of help or a life-preserver would have been acceptable just then.

"Mercy, mercy, Mr. Burglar! O Heaven, help me!" went on the thoroly frightened creature.

Similar screams and pleadings went up from all parts of the dormitory, and panic and pandemonium reigned.

The Dean came running in in her black pajamas with her hair streaming down the hall like a pirate's flag in a gale. She was barefooted and her corns bulged out like roasting-ears at half-mast. She burst into the teacher's room and dropped on her knees and began a wild and incoherent address to her Deity and the burglar:

"O Gawd, spare us! Save us! He'll kill us! O Mr. Man, please spare us! and oh, do go away, please! Help, Christ! Oh, we need Thee! Mr. Burglar, won't you spare us for your mother's sake?"

"Shut up, you frightened old cat! Nobody's goin' to harm you. Just keep quiet while I make er little collection for ther Mishunary Fund," facetiously laffed the burglar, and then he proceeded to ransack the room for money or jewels. Then he glanced over at the Dean and the other teacher, where they huddled in a corner and continued to pray. When he observed what a sight the Dean was, he casually remarked as he deliberately lighted a cigar:

"I don t find much *jewelry* in this young thing's room, but I

believe I'll just take You as a *jewel!*" Then as she began to scream again he snorted out into a boisterous laff.

Most of the other girls had gathered around the door and were shivering and praying and gibbering like a lot of frightened monkeys. Many of them had crawled under their beds and tried to hide their money and valuables.

This all happened in about two minutes' time. Not one of the bunch seemed to know what to do.

Just then Keldora and Zenda arrived on the scene and burst thru the crowd and made a leap for the burglar. He was so disconcerted and surprised he dropped his cigar and stared like one entranced. He caught the fiery look in Keldora's wonderful eyes and seemed hypnotized. She landed on top of him like a panther and threw her arms around his neck and began to choke him with all her might, and as her right arm was fairly under his chin she drew his head back so suddenly and gave it such a violent twist he lost all control of himself and began to gasp for air. Zenda was only a second behind Keldora in her rush at him and she grabbed his legs and pulled them from under him. He went down with a crash and both girls on top of him and Keldora still choking him.

"Tear up some towels or sheets and make ropes for securing our uninvited guest!" yelled Keldora at the frightened girls and teachers, for not one offered to help Keldora and Zenda. They were too stunned to realize what was really happening. This woke up some of them and they quickly brot sheet-ropes and soon had the cuss trussed up until he was safe and harmless. When Keldora released her grip on his throat, he soon revived and blurted out:

"Hell! you're the little gal from Missouri that beat ther Governor in a fair hoss-race!" And then he smiled and continued: "I won three hundred dollars on your pony, Miss Storm, but I'll be dinged if I knowed that you was er wildcat and er perfeshunal rassler all in one!" And he roared at his own humor.

"Oh! I'm not so bad as all that, my poor misguided man, but I can *storm* a little when the occasion needs a spell o' bad weather."

This return witticism made them all laff and restored order and sanity, and the place again looked more like a seminary than a mad-house.

"Oh, Miss Storm—Keldora, I mean, what shall we do now that we have caught the awful man?" whimpered the Dean in a fearfully strained voice.

"We'd better send for the police," chipped in several of the teachers and girls, who were still awfully scared.

"Then it will get in the papers and our place will be ruined," shuddered the Dean, who never lost sight of her beloved Institution and its bread-winning possibilities.

"Oh! excuse me for a moment," exclaimed the Dean as she caught sight of herself in fatigue uniform. She made a hasty retreat to her own room and soon returned in the eternal and rigorous black; but a good part of her former dignity was gone. Most any good burglar can knock our dignity galley-west and ungalley-east.

"Dean, as Zenda and I apprehended this poor boob, I think you had better let us settle him in our own way," quietly answered Keldora, who had come to a definite conclusion. Keldora believed in giving everyone a chance, and she had not forgotten what a little kindness had done to poor old Jeremiah (the mule) in the way of reformation and regeneration. She decided this man was a fairly good one, but in need of some better ideas and a chance to get off the shoals.

"Mr. Burglar, most everyone here is in favor of turning you over to the tender mercies of the police, and that means from five to twenty years in prison."

"Heavens! don't do that, please, for my poor wife and little girl baby are sick and in need of me," pleaded the wretch, with penitent tears coursing down his ruff cheeks.

"If you tell me the truth and I am satisfied that you *want* to begin all over again and play fairly from now on, I may give you a chance," said Keldora, without any feeling of resentment in her voice. She turned those wonderful eyes full into his and he saw a *new light* and surrendered unconditionally.

"Oh, yes, miss, I do want to be honest! but I've had so much bad luck ever since our little boy died of pneumonia in January, and then my wife was confined and has been sick ever since our little girl was born in February. The doctor bills cleaned us out and we still owe more'n a hundred: Then I got sick and lost my job. The little girl seemed ter do no good with er sick ma and we were all starvin' and the grocer and butcher would not let us have any credit. I got desperate and decided that I would save Lela and ther baby if I had ter stay in prison all my life." And he cried like a child.

"Is this your first offense against the law and humanity?" asked Keldora.

"Oh, yes, miss! and if it hadn't er bin fer our sickness and all ther bad luck, I never would have done such er wicked and desperate thing." He was shaking like one going to the gallows, and it was quite evident that the man was just convalescent from a spell of sickness.

"What is your age and your name?"

"I'm twenty-six in May and my name is Joel Clark."

"Where do you live?"

"We live at — Cherry Street, and Mrs. Clark and the baby are there now," returned Joel in a tone of voice that had a tinge of hope in it.

"Mr. Clark, we're going to keep you here under guard till I can investigate your story, and if I find it true and feel that I can trust you, I'll give you a chance to make good," said Keldora kindly.

"Better call in the police for such poo'h white trash," spit out the teacher who was so badly frightened and who called on "Divine Providence" so loudly.

"Christ said, 'Turn the other cheek and forgive them that despitefully use you,'" quoted Keldora sarcastically; "besides, *you* may be just as wrong in what is best to do with him as you were in calling on Divine Providence for help a short while ago," continued Keldora, with a look of pitying scorn that completely squelched her. "Remember, Zenda and I were the only D. P. that was on the job to-night."

This caused the girls to laff and smile, for this teacher was not much of a hit with the pupils anyway. Then, turning to the burglar, she continued:

"I'm going down where you say you live, and while I am gone I'm going to keep you in a room here with my little chum as your guard, and I assure you that she is something in the wildcat line when the occasion requires, so it will be quite useless for you to try to escape," explained Keldora to him.

"All right, miss; I won't try to escape and you will find that I have told the truth and that all I ask is a chance to be good and get on my feet again."

They put him in a vacant room, and Zenda sat at the open door as his jailer. She never allowed her eyes to leave him for an instant.

Keldora hurried down to the number on Cherry Street and

found a real pretty but sadly wasted little country girl of only nineteen, who admitted that she was Mrs. Joel Clark. The poor little thing was badly wasted and attenuated from sickness, childbirth and starvation, and her infant baby, a little more than two months old, was moaning and crying for nourishment, which the poor faded little mother could not furnish. She barely had enuff vitality to sustain her own life a little while longer without furnishing sustenance to another human being. Her plight was pitiable, but she tried to be cheerful and optimistic and attempted to belittle her poverty and condition.

"Yes, my husband has been sick too, and out of work, and we are in rather bad luck just now," she explained; "but he went out to-night to answer a call for a man wanted for night work in a restaurant, and won't be back till about 9 o'clock," explained the faithful little soul.

He had never told her the truth about how he intended trying to raise some money for food and other necessities. Keldora at once decided to not let the wife know the truth about the matter, for in her weakened condition the shock would prove fatal; besides, it wasn't necessary that she ever know it—provided her husband went straight, and she believed he would.

Keldora hurried back to the "Sem." and informed them that Clark had told the truth and acquainted them with the sad condition of the poor little wife and baby. They nearly all expressed sympathy and were in favor of releasing the captive.

"Mr. Clark, I find that you told me the truth, and if you will give me your promise and word of honor that you will never attempt anything crooked again, and that you will never again touch liquor nor tobacco, and do as I tell you, you may return to your wife and child."

"Yes, miss, I give you my word of honor that I will do as you have requested; and oh, I'm so glad I've met you and found a human being that has a heart full of kindness and sympathy!" protested the poor man; "and I'm so sorry for my crime, and I apologize to you all, and assure you all that I'll never attempt such a thing again." And the tears of joy and shame raced with one another down his dirty and furrowed cheeks.

"Untie him, Zenda, and I'll be back in a minute," and then she hurried to her room and skinned five hundred dollars off her roll and hurried back with it.

"Oh, but it feels good to be free again and among such friends!" breathed the poor cuss, with a sigh of relief.

"Here is some money to tide you all over your sickness and to pay the doctor and any other debts you owe—"

"But, miss, I can't accept money from you," protested Joel and he staggered as tho someone had struck him a blow.

"Mr. Clark, didn't you just promise to obey me?" and she gave him a quiet and reproachful look that went clear thru him and clinched itself on the other side.

"Yes, I did. But, oh, Miss Storm, you're too good to a wretch like me—I don't deserve it!" protested the man.

"Of course you deserve it, and I'm the doctor and *judge* both in this case, and you're to obey orders," smiled Keldora; "besides it wouldn't do a bit of good to turn you loose in your weakened condition to go back to your starving wife and child penniless. Money is the only medicine that can do you any good now and I am prescribing it. I didn't tell your wife about your little mis-step and the predicament it got you in, and you're not to mention it to her, either; in fact, she is never to know it."

And Keldora looked at all the others and her look was to be their law—at least in this case. They nodded their assent.

"Now you hurry back to your wife and get food and things as soon as you can get in the stores, for they need food first of all, and Zenda and I will come down and help your wife and baby after we get breakfast."

Then he quietly and with a new hope in his hunted eyes left the "Sem." for his home. At that moment a new soul was born in him, and the birds all seemed to be singing a new song—the great song of HUMANITY; and for the first time in his stressful and storm-tossed life he understood the great cosmic truth enunciated by the Galilean Teacher, "*Love thy neighbor as thyself*;" and the word *humanity* now had meaning—it was a beautiful and living thing that was stretching out its loving and all-embracing arms to all human-kind. He walked with a new step, for there was *music* in his feet. The crass animal in him died and the *human* was born. The winters would never faze the flowers any more, and all his nights hereafter would be spent at home with Lela and the baby. No more drinking and smoking and carousing around with the "boys." His only ambition now was to be a real man and make good "fer her sake," as he designated Keldora.

"Gee! but couldn't she and her little chum fight like a passel

o' wildcats?" mused Joel to himself one day after he was well and was returning to his home from his day's work.

Keldora, Zenda and one of the older girls, Mesta Oaks, went down on Church Street about 8 o'clock and bought the things that Lela Clark most needed, and then they went down there and the way they cleaned her and the baby and the house up was a caution. When they got thru, the place looked like a different place—clean bedding, clean clothes—everything was clean and new, and every little necessity they needed Keldora bought and took to them. Joel returned from a shopping expedition while they were there, and they soon had all three of them eating real food and laughing and crying by turns. Joel wanted to send for a doctor, but Keldora said it was not necessary at all, as what they all needed was plenty of good food, cleanliness, clean clothes and a sanitary house, and with all worry and strain off their minds, they'd soon be well and normal again—and her predictions came rapidly true; in fact, it was astonishing how rapidly and completely they all responded to a normal life. And Joel made good, too. He studied hard at spare moments and gradually acquired a fair education, and as soon as he was well enough he got a job down at the wharf, and then later with the railroad, and finally he became one of the best engineers on the L. & N. He never relapsed from the right path, and was soon respected and liked by his employers and fellow-workmen.

They soon moved out in the suburbs of East Nashville, where they would have no rent to pay and where they could buy a home on the installment plan, and where they could have a garden, a cow and some pigs and chickens, and be among the trees and grass, and have plenty of flowers and bird-music. Here he and his faithful wife reared their little girl and a stalwart son, and enjoyed life to the full—all due to Keldora's good sense and *humanity*. If it hadn't been for her, the poor devil would have been hardened into a sure-enough criminal in the penitentiary, and his wife would have been killed by the shock and his infant daughter would have died of starvation and neglect. How useless prisons will be when we all become civilized and *Humanity* is our universal religion!

Keldora and Zenda nursed and helped their new proteges back to health and often dined with them, and just loved to play with the baby and watch her grow and develop into a fine and healthy girl.

The story of Joel's one wrong move on life's great checker-board was never revealed and his wife never knew of it. In his

eyes Keldora was the *one* perfect human being, and he would have gladly laid his soul down for her to walk on.

CHAPTER XIX.

KELDORA AND ZENDA START FOR THE OZARKS.

The burglar stunt was the talk of the "Sem.," and altho every student promised to keep it under her hat, it soon leaked out; but the one important thing that did not leak out was the identity of the burglar. At first a few of the pupils and two of the teachers thought it ought to be reported to the authorities and let the law take its course, but Keldora and Zenda soon convinced these old fogies that such a course would only make matters much worse, and as none of them lost anything, and as it had afforded them some real sport of a startling nature, they soon came over and admitted that Keldora was right.

The girls invited the teacher who was so frightened and whom the burglar guyed to accompany them down on Cherry Street and see the little wife and the baby and see what a wonderful change a little humanity and common sense had wrought in that family that was so near the *Fatal Edge*. The girls carried books to Mrs. Clark and soon got her interested in reading and studying, and it wasn't long until there was as great change for the better in her mental condition as there was improvement in her physical status; and oh, how the kid did come out of her sickly and puny condition and grow into a real bright and healthy child! and every time Keldora and Zenda came to visit them she would run to meet them, and as soon as she could lisp a few words she would call Keldora "Anty K'dora," and Zenda was "Tant Zendy," and she just worshiped them both, and would cry to go with them when they had to depart. During one of their calls on the Clark family after they had moved out to their new home in East Nashville, Lela asked Keldora to suggest a pretty name for her little girl, as she and Joel had not yet decided on a name, and Joel felt sure, she told them, that any name Keldora or Zenda would give the child would always bring the youngster good luck. This touched a *Mysterious Something* near the center of their souls that greatly pleased them.

"But wouldn't you and Joel prefer to name the child?" queried Keldora in that quiet and softly dignified way of hers.

"Oh, no, Miss Storm! we could never think of anything half so pretty as you all could," protested the little mother.

"Very well, then; as Zenda and I are both her aunts, I think a

combination of both our names would be very odd and pretty and appropriate. We'll just put it *Kelzenda*—Kelzenda Clark, if that will be agreeable to you and Joel," announced Keldora, with a bright smile that was contagious, for they all laughed heartily and acquiesced in this decision.

"Just the thing!" enthused Zenda, "and I feel sure the child can never have any bad luck with such a mascot of a name as that," and they all laughed again.

Keldora got some fresh water, and while Lela held the youngster in the orthodox attitude, Keldora solemnly christened the child *Kelzenda Clark*—and Kelzenda Clark it was.

When Joel returned that evening from work and was informed of the proceedings, he was simply delighted and would have bet his last dollar that the kid would win every race on Life's slippery old track; and when he realized that it was a combination of both their names, he was very happy and proud.

There are few beings who haven't got enough good seed latent in them to bring forth an abundant harvest if placed in the right kind of environment and the seed given a chance to burgeon into a normal harvest, and the girls proved this in Joel's case. It didn't take them long to free Lela's mind from its old foggy ideas about life. They soon convinced her that *Humanity* was the only religion worth while, and that Reason and Experience were the best teachers and guides. They taught her how to cook properly and the value of foods and the importance of cleanliness and fresh air and close contact with the earth. They taught her to make their clothes and how to raise a garden scientifically, and the importance of systematic shopping and the utilization of everything that could be made to serve some good purpose.

"How in the world do you girls happen to know so much?" gasped Lela one evening when Keldora and Zenda were inculcating some new ideas about life and how it is moulded and shaped by its environment.

"In the first place, dear, we have only been taught the truth and haven't had to waste precious time *unlearning* a lot of bunk called religion and social ethics; and then we read scientific and Free-thought literature and thus acquire real learning," explained Keldora.

"Well, if your religion of *Humanity* will make me anywhere near like you all are, I sure intend to absorb all of it I can find," enthusiastically exclaimed the little mother, with a great light of

hope and enthusiasm shining thru her face from her purified and redeemed soul. "I certainly would have died and my baby perished from starvation and neglect if it hadn't been for you all and your goodness," ardently cried Lela, "and you all will ever be my guiding star," continued the happy wife and mother between the tears that just would sneak down her happy cheeks in spite of all her efforts to restrain them.

"Helping others and being kind to all living creatures is the central pillar of our religion," quietly explained Keldora, "and when one becomes truly converted to our religion of Humanity, he ceases to be selfish and dishonest and is always happiest when helping others."

"So in helping you folks we are only practicing *our* religion," smiled Zenda by way of confirming what Keldora had just said.

"Yes, helping others and being square and humane is the best way to make the flowers bloom in your own soul and the birds sing in your heart," concluded Keldora.

Then the girls kissed Lela and *Kelzenda*, and after a squeezing from them, they departed on Prince and Wingie and put in a couple of hours out in the country, playing and singing as they rode along. They were both ahead of their classes and were sure of graduating with high honors; so they were very happy, and the future was only a perfumed wilderness of tangled vines and fragrant flowers.

In the latter part of June they had completed the three-years course and graduated with the highest honors and were the recipients of many compliments and invitations from prominent people to visit them. The only invitation they accepted was from the Governor, and he gave a farewell dinner to them on the eve of their departure. At this reception they met many people of social and literary prominence and scored the biggest kind of a hit. When it was learned that they intended to make the trip home on horseback and unattended, the Governor and his guests were sure surprised and alarmed; but the girls laffed their fears away and assured their host that "a little jaunt of four hundred miles on horses that *could run* was nothing at all," and the way Keldora emphasized the words "could run" caused a big laff at the Governor's expense.

They were eighteen now and just at that sweet and impressionable age when the heart longs for that *Strange* and *Hungry Something* that keeps the vines tangled and the flowers blooming all down the dim and Trackless Ages. Just what that Strange SOMETHING is no

one seems to know, but we are all subject to its soft and silver-voiced call, and sooner or later we all fall for it and hoist the white flag of surrender.

The heart of youth craves life and excitement and must have some tangled vines and flowers and new-mown hay in which to dream. Every life must have its *Dream*—every foot must have its dance. Keldora and Zenda now longed to get away in the wild and bird-voiced woods and let *Old Mamselle Nature* tell their fortunes among the wild and friendly flowers—where the timid wood-dove mumbles its wordless love-songs all day, and where the wild fox slips down to the yodling brook at eventide to slake its thirst and yearn at the new moon as it lazily rises above the haze-capped peaks off to the east.

There is *Something* about the deep and silent solitude of the Primeval Woods and the Eternal Hills, where all life is a free and *Tangled Symphony*, that just gets in the blood and riots and tunes our souls to the music of the tumbling waters and the wind-swayed vines that cling to the free and lofty trees. It is here in this balmy and *Trackless Arcadia* of Nature, where the greedy and dollar-marked feet of man have made no crooked paths to mar its perfect beauty, that our souls are free and life a *Tranquil Dream*.

Now that they had been cooped up about three years in an orthodox school and an environment where almost everything was unnatural, hypocritical and sordid, they had a big and vigorous touch of the Old Primeval Fever—the fever that is germless, but burns the soul with a mighty thirst. It was now the latter part of June, and all Nature was glorious and resplendent and was sending out wireless messages to these two hypersensitive souls, whose natures were ever in accord with our Great All-Mother. The prospect of a four-hundred-mile jaunt on their beloved and sympathetic steeds, which so loved them that they never had to be tied nor hitched, was exhilarating and soul-teazing. Their books and heavy things they sent home by express and only carried their banjo and guitar, six-shooters and rifles and a few garments they really would need; so they were not burdened with much luggage to fatigue the horses. They were in no hurry, and intended to enjoy the trip and study the country as they went along.

The girls and teachers gave them a big farewell reception, and the Dean even condescended to squeeze them and kissed them good-bye thru her tears, which she could not quite restrain.

“Good-bye, and God protect and bless you!” fervently ex-

claimed the Dean, and then she turned away to hide her honest tears.

"Good-bye and good luck to all of you!" exclaimed the girls; and then the splendid animals leaped forward like they do in a race and galloped off on Sixth Avenue toward the great Northwest—to Keldora's ideal home in the beautiful Ozarks. It didn't take them long to shake the dirt of old Nashville off their restless feet. They covered about thirty-five miles that day, and tied up for the night at a farm-house in northern Tennessee. They enjoyed their day's ride, and had rested about an hour and a half under a big spreading walnut tree that stood sentinel over a pretty little creek that emptied into the Cumberland River a few miles to the southeast.

While Prince and Wingie munched the soft and abundant grass and rubbed their noses together at intervals, Keldora and Zenda ate a light lunch of nuts, fruit and cheese, and then played and sang like a couple of woodland fairies. It wasn't long until five villainous-looking negroes approached from behind some bushes a short distance down the stream, and politely exclaimed:

"Weuns just couldn't stand such fine music as you all's playin' without comin' nearer to it!"

"That's all right, but the music will be sweeter and sound better if you stay over there by those trees!" announced Keldora in a tone of voice that had a master ring to it.

"Oh, miss! we all ain't agoin' to hurt you all—don't be afeared; we's just a passel o' wufless niggers what's fond of music," protested a big mulatto, who appeared to be their spokesman; but they all kept on edging up a little closer as they protested their good intentions, and two of the younger ones proceeded to execute some grotesque dance movements and chant some wild and unintelligent folk-lore current among the negroes of the Southland. The girls put down their instruments and immediately drew their revolvers.

"We also play on these *war* instruments, and I see a fly on your nose that needs picking off," laughingly exclaimed Keldora, and before the astonished blacks realized her intentions, she took lightning aim and let go a shot that clipped a fly from the leader's big yellow nose and just touched the skin where the fly had been taking a walk. At almost the same time Zenda shot the pipe out of another one's mouth and it splintered into a thousand pieces. This was too much for the blacks and they precipitately fled over the banks and lost no time putting space between themselves and the

calico troubadours. After they had run for about two miles, the gang stopped under some trees to rest a bit and have a talk, etc.

"Sufferin' catfish!" exclaimed Paducah Sam, a big black who worked on river craft when he worked at all and was out of jail, "but dem gals is sure some dead shots, I'se heah ter tell yuh all." And he tried to borrow a pipe from one of his pals.

"An' whar's thet fly that wuz on yuh nose, nigger?" laffingly inquired Memphis Pete of High-step Tom, the mulatto who acted as their spokesman.

"Golly, boys! but I seed thet thar bullet go plum straight thru Mr. Fly," laffed Cairo Bob, as he felt of High-step's flyless proboscis. Then they all shuddered and laffed as only negroes can.

"It would sure be safer to tackle a passel o' wildcats than them two musishuners," sagely observed Hickman Charley, a rather quiet and mild-looking black, who limped a little on the left side. "Dis nigger's in fer mindin' his own bizness the hereafter," continued Charley, and the others all agreed that Charles was about right. "More niggers gets into trouble foolin' wid der whites than any udder way," concluded Charley.

"Uh-huh!" was the only response and it came from four mouths at the same time.

The girls had a big laff and then resumed their music, to the delight of the birds. They had no fear the negroes would return, and knew they could take care of themselves if they did.

The Old Farmer and his wife and one girl, a granddauter, made up the family of the farmer with whom they passed the first night. The Old Folks were pleased to have two such beautiful and distinguished guests honor them, and it didn't take the Old Lady and the girl Irene and an old colored Mammy long to have a delightful and appetizing supper ready. It consisted of fried spring chicken, new potatoes and peas, corn bread, butter, and strawberries and cream. The youngsters were hungry after their long and happy ride and meager noon lunch; so they enjoyed it fully and were soon at home and chatting in the easy and well-bred manner of educated people whose environment was congenial. The Old Folks were certainly astonished when they learned that two such young ladies were undertaking such an unheard-of journey without attendants; but the girls only smiled and assured their hosts that they would get home all right and rather enjoyed the novelty of it.

"But there are so many worthless niggers runnin' thru the

country," protested the Old Farmer, and a look of anxiety spread over his kind old face.

"Yes; we had the pleasure of an informal meeting with a bunch of five blacks at noon to-day while we were quietly eating our lunch and playing a little on our instruments out under a big walnut tree on the banks of the creek back there," quietly smiled Keldora; "but after I shot a fly off the leader's nose at about thirty yards and Zenda snipped a pipe out of a black mouth with her six-shooter, our would-be visitors concluded they didn't care for white company any way, so they vamoosed without even stopping to make their adieus."

"Why, they didn't even leave their addresses, in case we might want to correspond with them," cut in Zenda with her biting sarcasm, that was as unerring as her bullets.

"Heavens! mother, we must get out a posse and capture the black rascals!" stormed the Old Man, whose Southern blood was already near the boiling-point.

"Oh! it's not necessary, Mr. McHenry, I assure you. They were only a few ignorant and impudent niggers and didn't do a bit of harm; why, we even enjoyed teaching them a little lesson in racial politeness," continued Keldora.

"Well, you're sure all a brave lot," commented Mrs. McHenry.

After supper they all hied themselves out on the bluegrass lawn, and the girls, feeling good and in a musical mood, unslung their instruments and proceeded to play and sing, to the delight and utter astonishment of the McHenrys and Irene. Irene was also no mean musician, and when the girls encouraged her to sing with them, she was delighted, and their voices all harmonized together perfectly. In less than an hour Irene was crazy about Keldora and Zenda, and the McHenrys were not much behind in their admiration of the guests so strangely come to their doors.

"Such music, mother, is worth hearing!" exclaimed McHenry to his wife after they had sung and played about ten minutes.

"It certainly is, pap!" enthusiastically returned his wife, with a look of tender and motherly love in her dear old Irish eyes as she looked at the girls and watched them as they performed so easily and gracefully and with such feeling and expression.

The full moon slowly arose out of the mountains of eastern Tennessee, it seemed, and lazily dreamed along over the State in all its full-orbed beauty and yellow glory. It was a night for song and poetry, for love and living, and the spirit of the night seemed to swim in the girls' blood, and they played on and on with an easy

abandon and all oblivious of Time. The night was so perfect and balmy the girls decided to just shake down in their blankets out in the front yard on the soft and inviting bluegrass—man's primeval bed. Irene also brought out a quilt and some blankets and Keldora and Zenda cuddled her up between them, and soon the trio were drifting away in Dreamland's Fair Arcadia, and did not realize that another day had dawned until they were awakened by Aunt Liza's deep and sonorous voice exclaiming:

"You chilluns sure'll miss your brekfus if you all ain't up this blessed minute!"

"Awh! Aunt Liza, what you all go and wake us for so early?" sleepily droned Irene as she crept into Keldora's arms and snuggled up like a cold kitten to a warm stove in February. Keldora loved and mothered the motherless girl for a few minutes, and they all jumped up and made ready for breakfast—an ample repast of strawberries and cream, smearcase, fried chicken and new potatoes, honey and buckwheat cakes, and real coffee. Everything was just right, for Aunt Liza was carried away by their music the evening before, and had laid herself out to prepare a meal suitable to such extraordinary guests. And when this good old black soul cooked for those she loved, it was sure to be a real meal.

Irene was only twelve, but rather advanced for her age, and it was sure a disappointment for her to say "Good-bye" to the girls next morning. She was the life and hope of the Old Folks, and the only child of their only dauter, who had been dead seven years.

Irene had a fine pony all her very own and was very fond of riding and all out-door sports. Their nearest town was a small village near the Kentucky line and about nine miles distant, and she soon gained the consent of "Grampum," as she called Mr. McHenry, to ride over as far as the village with the girls. This would ever be an event in Irene's life; and the three girls did make a beautiful picture as they proudly cantered away together that perfect June day.

Mr. McHenry was almost insulted when Keldora offered to pay for their meals, etc. "Did they think he was a *Yankee* from the North?" That settled it. It was hard for the girls to spend any money, for everyone fell in love with them and was anxious to entertain them.

They all stopped in the little village and watered their horses, and then Keldora treated to ice cream and Zenda bought a box of candy for Irene to take home and also enuff of a bright and highly

colored pattern of calico for Aunt Liza a new dress. Then they bade Irene good-bye, and sauntered away toward the north.

The next three nights were spent in Kentucky and at farm homes, where they were received and entertained like queens. Their polite and gentle breeding and divine music opened all doors to them. The fifth day out they reached Paducah about 5 o'clock in the evening, and put their horses in the best and cleanest livery stable they could find, and then proceeded to the principal hotel—the old Palmer House. After supper they attended the theater, and enjoyed a good performance by a good company. It was Friday evening when they arrived in Paducah, and they decided to remain over till Monday before resuming their journey. They wanted to see more of the theater and the bright lights; besides, they were in no hurry anyway.

After breakfast they strolled into the parlor of the hostelry and were delighted to find a really good piano and almost new—a fine old square Chickering—and it was in tune, too. Keldora seated herself at the instrument, and soon both girls were singing some highbrow songs that soon brot an audience to the parlor and corridors. Among their listeners were the manager of the show and two of his warblers, and to say that they were astonished and delighted would be putting it mildly. They were crazy about the girls and the way they could play. The manager introduced himself and several members of the company to the girls and politely asked if they desired an engagement.

“Oh, no!” laffed Keldora; “we are just a couple of green country school-girls on our way home from college in Nashville, and our people live in the country down in the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas.”

“We just play a little for our own amusement,” corroborated Zenda, with that polite sarcasm of hers.

“I wish I might have the pleasure of hearing such music every day,” quietly chipped in a refined and musical voice that had a familiar sound to it. Keldora wheeled around to see who had thus addressed her, and there stood, with his hat in hand and politely bowing to the girls, the Supreme Court judge who had bet a thousand dollars on Keldora's Prince at the State fair and, after winning the bet from the Governor, had turned the amount over to Keldora—refusing to keep the money.

“Why, Judge! This is an unexpected pleasure indeed;” and she cordially extended her dainty white hand toward him and re-

ceived his hearty hand-shake in return. "And this is my little chum and college-mate, Miss Zenda Woodbine, of Arkansas," smiled Keldora as she presented her chum to the Justice.

After the introductions were over, Zenda just had to fire one of her high-range shots that always brought down the biggest game: "Your honor, have you attended the races lately?"

And then they all three had a jolly good laff, and "His Honor" asked permission to bring his wife to call on the girls, after which he wanted them to be their guests during their stay in Paducah. The girls promptly invited him to bring the missus in time to be their guests at luncheon at the hotel, and then they would dine with the Justice and his wife. This pleased the Justice very much and he soon returned with his wife, a rather young woman (about twenty-seven) and a very courteous and charming lady of broad and liberal mind. After luncheon the girls got their instruments and played and sang for about an hour, and the Judge's wife did the piano part of it—and did it well, too, for she was a finished musician, and the Judge had a fine bass voice that could hold its own almost any place. The parlor and corridors soon became so packed that it was impossible to get thru. They were getting too much notoriety, so the girls invited the Judge and his wife to be their guests at the matinee that afternoon, and that night the Judge and his wife entertained the girls with a box party at the theater. They were having the time of their lives, and when it was found that they were the guests of Judge B——, everybody wanted to meet them. At the theater that night the audience had learned in some mysterious way who the Judge's guests were, and after the curtain went down on the second act there was a perfect storm of calls for "Miss Storm and Miss Woodbine!" and every glass in the vast audience was leveled at the girls in Judge B——'s box. The manager of the company came out and beckoned for them to respond, but they shook their heads and tried to hide behind the draperies. It wouldn't go with the audience, and the Mayor came in the box with the managers of the company and the theater and, after being presented to Keldora and Zenda, they begged them on behalf of the audience to honor such a magnificent compliment to themselves. Judge B—— and his wife also joined in the request. Then the girls both made a little run and jump from the rail of the box and landed on the stage like a couple of young panthers, and did it so easily and gracefully that it brot down the house. After bowing their acknowledgments to the audience, they asked for a banjo and

a guitar, and members of the company handed them two very fine and silver-mounted instruments, and the "supers" had placed a couple of chairs for them. The girls turned themselves loose and played with the old inspired passion in such a masterly way the audience just went wild; then they responded with some of their own woodland songs they had composed down in the Ozarks and that, as Keldora explained, they used to sing in serenading the birds. And ioh, with what wild and vine-tangled beauty and primeval passion they did sing and act! All the wild beauty and soft, gentle tenderness and passion of the hills and woods, the trees and tangled vines and flowers, the birds and bees, the perfume of all the wild flowers, and the gurgling sweetness of the rippling mountain brooks, and the wordless alto of the new-mown hay, and the æolian aurevoirness of the *Southwind*—all seemed to be singing and dreaming in their wonderful voices at the same time. Like all true artists, they forgot themselves — time and place — everything — and only their dear old native hills — the eternal and forgetless Ozarks—were with them and embracing them in their wild and all-enfolding arms. The audience simply gasped and sat entranced—the entire company came out in the wings and listened like hypnotized birds. And when they switched into the "Arkansaw Traveler" and wound up with "Dixie," as only they could play those immortal pieces, the audience just simply went wild and tossed their hats and anything else that was loose up in the air and continued to yell and kept it up for quite awhile after the next act had begun.

CHAPTER XX.

KELDORA AND ZENDA IN A NEW SAMARITAN ACT.

After the evening performance Saturday night, the girls went to the hotel and got their instruments and luggage and then accompanied the Judge and his wife to the jurist's suburban home, where they remained as his guests until the following Tuesday. When they asked for their bill at the hotel, the manager politely informed them that they did not owe the hostelry a cent, and that more than twenty prominent people had called at the hotel and begged the privilege of paying their score. This touched the girls deeply and the look of gratitude they returned the manager was ample remuneration as far as he was concerned; besides, the manager and his wife were both musicians, and they enjoyed the treat so highly they considered it an honor to have such guests with them.

In those good old days, and especially in the Southland, dollar-

chasing was unknown. The Jews did not own and control every thing like they do to-day.

Sunday was a happy and memorable day out at the jurist's magnificent home, and in the afternoon the girls and the Judge and his wife took a horseback jaunt around Paducah and the adjacent country. The Judge and his wife were fond of riding and had splendid mounts.

The girls intended to resume their homeward journey Monday morning, but were persuaded by their host and hostess to remain over till Tuesday in order to be the guests of honor at a reception at the Judge's home Monday night. The *élite* and cream of Paducah's musical and literary set were bidden to the feast, and came with bells on, so to speak; and oh, such a night of music and good-fellowship!

Late Tuesday forenoon Keldora and Zenda bade their new friends good-bye and headed for the ferry and were soon cantering gaily and happily thru Illinois toward Cape Girardeau, Missouri, where they would cross the Mississippi into their beloved old Missouri. But they were destined to be delayed before reaching Missouri. About 3 o'clock on the afternoon of the third day up in Illinois, and right at the edge of the wide Mississippi bottom, which is about seven miles wide, and over which the water plays havoc during flood years, they turned into a rather dilapidated-looking farm-house to water their horses and to make some inquiries about the way across the bottom, which was yet partly filled with water from the late receding flood. They were greeted by the fierce barking of a couple of mongrel dogs and the intermittent groans and screams of a woman in deep distress.

"We must investigate this," positively exclaimed Keldora, and both girls jumped down and ran to the door and knocked loudly. A weak and distracted voice bade them to enter. A young woman, who appeared to be about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, was tossing and moaning on a bed that was disheveled to the last degree.

"Oh! Oh! Mercy! Help me!" she moaned piteously, and then her whole frame seemed to draw up, and she let out another stifled groan and scream, and tried to stuff the sheet in her mouth to stifle her agonies.

"What's the matter, dear?" kindly cooed Keldora, with all the mother-love of her great soul ebbing out of her glorious eyes, and at the same time she placed her warm and magnetic hand on the poor creature's brow and tried to soothe her.

"Oh! Oh! I'm—I'm—having a—baby!" she moaned and gasped between moans; "but you're just *young girls*," she continued, "and won't understand nor know what to do. Oh! what shall I do? Oh! Oh! Where's Bob?" And again the awful pains gripped her, and she tried bravely to stifle the moans that shook her like an aspen leaf.

"Is Bob your husband?" timidly ventured Zenda.

"Yes, oh, yes! but why he don't come I don't know!" and she softly cried between her moans.

"Where is your husband?" asked Keldora with a trace of impatience in her fine voice. "He surely ought to be here."

"I—I didn't expect to be sick for about two weeks yet, and when the awful pains suddenly took me at dinner to-day, Bob went out to the pasture to catch Jumper, our new horse that he recently traded for, and said he'd hurry to town for the doctor and stop at Sam Benson's and tell his wife to come right over and stay with me till the doctor and Bob got here. But he hasn't got back yet, and no one's been near me. You see, we live so far back from the main road no one could hear me if I screamed my head off." Then the awful pains doubled her up again, and she moaned and yelled as before.

"Perhaps some accident has befallen your husband," ventured Zenda again. "Where is the pasture? I'll go and see if I can find him, and Keldora will remain with you and help all she can."

After being told where to go, Zenda was off like a wild pigeon, and soon found the pasture and three horses peacefully cropping the abundant grass and fighting the flies co-operatively. Then she heard a groan over toward the south side of the pasture and hurried thither. She found Bob all right enuff—or rather, what was left of the poor devil. His right leg was broken in two places and his left arm badly dislocated and his face badly bruised and covered with dried blood. He had returned to consciousness about an hour before, he told her, and cried for help till he was exhausted, and then tried to crawl to the house, but found he was unable to do so.

"For God's sake, get me some water!" he begged, and then sank back and moaned.

Here was a pretty pickle indeed. The girls thought they had seen trouble before, but this was the worst ever. However, they were not a bit rattled like most girls would have been, and set to work as best they could to help these helpless and unfortunate creatures.

"Water! Water!" repeated Bob Thorp piteously.

"All right; I'll get it for you and be right back," cried Zenda, and she sprinted away toward the house like a fat man running to catch a street car that has about half a block the start of him. Zenda soon reached the house, and after briefly explaining the situation to Keldora, she found a bucket and tin cup and filled the bucket with water from a near-by well, and hurried back to Bob; and oh, how the poor devil did drink—and drink! It seemed he would never get enuff. Then he sank back and soon drifted off into a merciful sleep. Zenda arranged some twigs and leaves over his face for shade and to keep the flies away from his wounds, and then she hurried back to the house to consult with Keldora. When she arrived at the house, the baby was a citizen of Illinois and Keldora had it in a dishpan of water and was washing it as tho she had been a nurse all her life. She had seen her mother and some of their neighbors perform this simple rite of ablution a number of times; besides, Keldora and Zenda had carefully studied two large works on obstetrics while in college, besides a number of other doctor-books that had been brought to the college by girls whose fathers or brothers were physicians; so they were by no means greenies. They knew just what to do and how to go about it. This knowledge came in handy now.

The baby was a lusty little rascal and had a good pair of lungs, and from the noise he was making one might think he was an I. W. W. protesting against the injustices of his environment.

As this was Mrs. Thorp's first stunt in the baby line, she had very few baby clothes and other arrangements prepared. This didn't daunt Dr. Keldora in the least—she knew how to meet and overcome obstacles. She found a clean pillowslip and cut a hole in the center of its bottom just big enuff for the baby's head to get thru, and then at each side she cut holes for its tiny arms. Then she and Zenda put him in his first dress and tied the bottom together so he couldn't wiggle and kick out of it. Then they laid him back beside his mother, and got busy again. She was resting quietly and inclined to sleep.

They briefly explained that Bob had caught Jumper and jumped on him in the field and intended to thus ride him back to the barn without a saddle or bridle. This might have worked all right, but Bob had some sandburs on the inside legs of his trousers and these ticklish little things stung Jumper right in the flanks, where he was most sensitive and ticklish, and as Jumper was a rather high-strung animal and inclined to temperament, he resented it by showing Rob-

ert a few stunts in high and lofty jumping and tumbling. Bob tumbled all right, and was unconscious for about two hours from the effects of the way he fell—partly on his head and shoulders. It didn't matter to Jumper whether he was unconscious or only *dead*. No one could play jokes on Jumper and get away with it. The man from whom Bob got Jumper had warned him that the critter was a little nervous and "skittish" at times.

"Damn him! I'll take that all out of him," was Rbert's only comment.

"All right; see that you do," was his laconic rejoier.

They knew that Bob would probably sleep for several hours, but realized that he must have prompt attention. Zenda was dispatched on Wingie to Benson's, about four miles to the north, to tell them to go to town at once for a doctor, and for Mrs. Benson to come over and help Mrs. Thorp. Keldora remained and looked after Ethel (*Mrs. Thorp*) and the youngster. It didn't take Wingie long to cover the short distance to the Benson farm, but no one was at home; so she rode like the wind to the town about five miles further on, but when she got there she was informed that Dr. Rabe had gone to Cairo the preceding Saturday and hadn't yet returned—"And most likely won't for a week or longer," supplied a bystander, with a sly wink at the barber.

"Where's another doctor?" hurriedly asked the girl.

"This hyar blamed ol' town just ain't never had no such thing as another doc," laughed the same buttinsky. "But Rabe'll turn up when he absorbs all ther booze in Cairo, I reckon," continued her informant, facetiously.

Zenda ran across the street to a primitive drug store and hurriedly made a few purchases, then she jumped in the saddle and showed the gawking natives how to get a move on. When she got back Ethel was quietly sleeping, and as Thorp, Jr., had found where they kept the milk, he wasn't worrying a bit about this world and its teeming troubles.

The girls hurriedly made a litter out of a couple of hoop-poles and some pieces of rope, and then hurried to the field to bring in Bob. He was just coming out of his deep and refreshing sleep and wanted more water. They soon had him in the house and on a cot they improvised for the occasion, as the house only afforded one bed and the missus had to have that. They first reduced the dislocated shoulder joint and this gave immediate relief. Then they set the broken femur bone and the fractured tibia, and made

some splints out of some weatherboards ripped from the smoke-house and some shingles from the roof, and with the aid of the few articles Zenda was thotful enough to bring from town, and some bandages they made from sheets and pillowslips, they soon had "Reckless Robert," as they afterward named him, trussed up in real style. As they had no plaster of Paris to use on the limbs, they packed them solid in the good old Illinois gumbo, and bade him to be perfectly quiet, and they would soon have him up and kicking again. Then they washed his face and hands and dressed faee and scalp wounds, and bade him to sleep and be quiet.

"But who are you girls?" he wanted to know, as he gave them a look of deep gratitude.

"Never mind that now," cautioned Zenda, "for you are too weak and exhausted to talk or even listen. You're the father of a fine boy, and the youngster and his mother are all right and resting nicely, and that's all you're to be told to-night."

"Well, I'm sure grateful to you folks, whoever you are, and I'm going to do just as you say." And soon "Reckless Robert" was sleeping easily again.

The girls were tired out after all this excitement and nervous tension, and after milking the two cows and drinking some of the rich milk, they took turns at sleeping out in the yard on the grass and their own blankets, and turns at sitting up and watching their patients and waiting on them. They were astir early next morning, and did the milking, killed a chicken, and soon had a tempting little breakfast prepared. Bob sure had some appetite, and while Zenda fed him and eased him a little to make him more comfortable Keldora served breakfast to Ethel and administered to her needs, and then she fished Junior out of his pillowslip Mother Hubbard and washed him and tossed him up in her hands a few times and showed him to his dad, who just gasped and exclaimed:

"Wal, I'll be dam—I beg pardon, miss, but I meant dinged!"

"Yes, Robert, you must not swear while we have company," gently warned his wife.

Then the girls fell to and enjoyed their breakfast, after which they went to work and cleaned up the place and put everything to rights, and it was hardly recognizable when they completed their work. Then they got out their instruments and serenaded their patients for about an hour; and to say that the Thorps were delighted would be putting it mildly. Then the girls briefly explained who they were and how they came to be there.

"Well, I'll be—!"

"Robert!" warned Ethel again, just in time.

It developed that the Thorps had only been married about a year and had come out there from Indiana. They had no relatives in Illinois, and few nabors; in fact, the country was sparsely settled in those days, and the houses were often miles apart.

"We'd a all died, I reckon, if you folks hadn't just happened along when you did," observed Bob that evening after supper.

"And I don't know how we're ever going to pay you for what you've done," sadly mused Mrs. Thorp, with a look of gratitude toward Keldora, who was tossing Junior up in her hands and cooing to him like a real little mother.

"Never mind about that," returned Keldora, with a sweet and cheerful smile. "You all don't owe us anything yet and are not likely to ever do so."

"It's a part of our religion to help our fellow-men and do all the good we can," added Zenda, with an optimistic look at them both.

"We're in no hurry, and as duty has assigned us a little work here, we shall remain and see you all safely thru," assured Keldora in that sedative voice of hers.

Keldora rode over to the town the next day and bought groceries, dress goods and other materials needed in the Thorp home, and then the girls fell to and it wasn't long until they had new sheets, pillowslips, towels, etc., and a new dress for Ethel and a house-wrapper and cloth slippers for her to wear about the house; and Junior soon had some sure-enuff baby clothes, and the little rascal was never so happy as when the girls were playing with him. He grew and thrived like a jimpson weed in August; and the third day Ethel was able to be up and knock around some; in a week she was all right; and as Bob was getting well as rapidly as possible, a new light seemed to o'erspread the whole place. And oh, what a boon the music was to them all!

The girls remained two weeks, until all the danger was past and they had carefully coached the Thorps in the principles of health and showed Ethel how to dress Bob's wounds and care for him, and then one bright Wednesday morning they proceeded on their way. Just before departing, Keldora slipped two one-hundred-dollar bills under Ethel's pillow, where she would find them that night—"For the poor devils are hard up and it will be such a help to them," explained the girl to her pal.

"I'm so glad you did it, dear, for it would have been so hard on them to be thus left without a dollar, and Ethel told me they had got down to their last fifty-cent piece," said Zenda in her soft and soothing Ozark voice.

They reached Cape Girardeau about noon, and on learning that a big theatrical attraction was billed for that night, they decided to remain over till the next day. They stopped at a hotel, and carefully refrained from playing and singing any, as they wished to avoid all notoriety and just simply wanted to rest and relax.

CHAPTER XXI.

A BEAR EPISODE AND SOME SHOOTING.

They greatly enjoyed their rest and stop in the Cape, and the following morning departed toward the southwest. They attracted a lot of attention in the Cape anyway, on account of their rare beauty and sweet, graceful ways. Several of the Cape's beaux dropped in at the hotel and scanned the register, but all they found was "K. Storm, Mo.," and "Z. Woodbine, Ark."—nothing very inviting nor romantic about that.

The next morning when they called at the stable for their nags, they observed a well-dressed and distinctly Southern gentleman who bore the imprint of Mississippi so plainly in his dress and manners it would be impossible not to place him at a glance. He was tall and had a quiet and dignified way about him that bespoke the master. When the nags were brot out and the girls about to vault into the saddles, he approached Keldora politely and removed his wide white hat and bowed courteously as he inquired:

"I beg pardon, miss, but is that pony for sale?"

"No, indeed," laffed Keldora; "he's my wings—my pal and comrade, and neither one could live without the other," and she laid her pretty head over against Prince's face and patted his proud and arched neck. Prince gave the Mississippian a hostile look that was both a challenge and good-bye.

"I'm a great admirer of fine hosses," easily went on the Colonel, "and I should just love to take that fine little rascal home with me for Harold—my only grandson," explained the gentleman; "but I don't blame you for not wanting to part with him;" and the Colonel reached over to give Prince a pat on the nose, but the pony landed first, and a bit of the Colonel's coat sleeve was between his gleaming teeth. "Zounds!" roared the astonished and irate man, "but he is a vicious brute!"

"Oh, no, Colonel! not that bad. He understood that you desired to separate us, and then he always resents strangers who try to get acquainted with him without a proper introduction; in fact, he is a very blue-blooded and exclusive animal and is full of what you might call 'temperament,'" responded Keldora; and the crowd of bystanders gave the Colonel a big horse-laff as the girls lightly vaulted into their saddles and started off down the main thoroughfare of the town.

"Well, shiver my timbers!" exclaimed an old river-man as he silently gazed after the girls as they rapidly disappeared down the street, "but if they ain't a pair of nifty yachts I never seed any afore, and I've been up and down the old river for more'n fifty year!"

"Colonel, I understand you're in the market for a *gentle* pony?" facetiously inquired the liveryman, as the Colonel started to walk away.

"Ah! go to—St. Louis!" roared the irate man, and he walked on without uttering another word.

The girls covered about thirty-five miles that day, and tied up at a farm-house for the night. During the night an awful commotion and uproar was heard out in the cow-pen down under the hill, and as the girls were bunking out in the yard in their blankets and a couple of bearskins their host placed at their disposal, they decided to investigate it themselves and not alarm the family. They jumped up and with their rifles and six-talkers hurried down to the corral just in time to see a huge black bear killing a three-months old calf, and its mother frantically bellowing and rapidly walking around the bear and her slain offspring.

"Oh, ho, Mr. Bear! Buying a calf without money!" exclaimed Zenda, and before Keldora had time to act, Zenda fired a shot from her rifle that promptly settled Bruin. The huge and fierce-looking beast gave a few violent kicks and then gasped a few times and was no more.

The poor distressed cow ran up and proceeded to lick her dead offspring and to moo-oo over it like a mother does when her baby is hurt. Keldora sidled up to the cow and gently put her arms around the poor distressed critter's neck and tried to soothe and comfort her, and after the poor old soul realized that her baby was gone forever, she turned around and proceeded to lick Keldora and tried to mother the girls in her bovine way. The girls both petted her and soothed her, and she walked away with them up where the

gate was, and they let her out and she followed them up to the front yard, and after moo-oo-ing a few times and looking back toward where her child lay dead, she rubbed her nose against them and tried to mother them awhile, and then she lay down on the soft grass near them and moaned gently thruout the night. The old critter was astir early next morning and waked the girls trying to love and mother them, and then she walked down to the corral gate and gazed in silence and longing at her dead—and her dear old eyes were wet and leaky with maternal tears.

The girls attended to their ponies, and soon the whole family were astir.

When the Kelvies learned of their guests' daring exploit, their admiration knew no bounds.

"My sakes alive! but wasn't you all afeard to death?" exclaimed Mother Kelvie at breakfast.

"We were raised in the Ozarks," explained Zenda, "and don't scare very easily—especially by bears and wildcats."

"I think I've killed about six bears and eleven bobs," carelessly announced Keldora, as tho she were only speaking of slaying chickens or swatting flies.

"I haven't kept much account of the varmints I've killed," luffed Zenda; "but one time when I was thirteen I was out over the mountain after the cows, and a big cinnamon bear almost got me. He was about fifty feet away when I discovered him, and he said: 'Hol' on, little gal; I want to talk to you.' I 'lowed he hadn't nuthin' much ter say that'd interest me, so I just pulled er bead on him and let go; but the cap was a little damp and it didn't go; but old Mr. Cinnamon was sure goin' some—and right in my direction, too; but the second time I pulled the trigger it boomed like the crack o' doom, and Mr. Cin. was not traveling any more."

The way Zenda got this off in the local *patois* of the Ozarks was irresistible, and the whole family just roared and said she was the real sport, "without a pinch o' yaller," as the old man put it.

The Kelvies were from Arkansaw, and when they learned that Zenda was a native of that State, Ned, the eldest boy, and who was just about the same age as the girls, wanted to elope with her right then and there. They just luffed at him, and told him he was too young to think of such serious matters. The girls had both had many splendid opportunities to marry while in Nashville and again in Paducah; but they hadn't yet found the *right* one, it seemed.

The Kelvies skinned the bear and wanted to give the hide to

Zenda, but she told them they had so many of them at home it wouldn't be worth while.

Before they departed the next morning, they unslung their instruments and played a few of the old mountain airs and folk-songs so loved thruout the Southland.

A look of pain and mortification swept over Mr. Kelvie's fine old Scotch face when they asked how much they owed for their meals, etc.

"Why, pap, do they think we're *Yankees*?" and poor Ned looked distressed.

The whole family tried to persuade them to prolong their stay and they would call in the nabors and have a real old-time bear-hunt and barn-dance; but they decided to go on, and rode away in the sunlight to another adventure before reaching home.

They rode about thirty miles that day and over some very ruff country; but a little after 5 o'clock that beautiful June evening they came out on a high bluff overlooking the White River and its wide and beautiful valley. It was about three miles from the bluff to the river; and nestling down near the wide sweep of rich bottom land, and on the west bank of a pretty and picturesque little mountain brook that quietly tumbled out of the deep ravine and then hurried on to keep its engagement with the river, was one of those big, lofty and roomy Colonial mansions of the old planter days style. It had big friendly porches running around it from all sides, and on the east, south and west sides rose-bushes and morning glories were interwoven into a latticed arbor and made an ideal bower for the birds to sing and play in. These vines were just thick enough to make a good shade and yet permit the *South-wind* to play hookey in and out between its leaves and blossoms. It was sure a place to rest and dream—to live and love. It was a romantic and historic old structure that was a part of the history and romance of the Old Days in the Ozarks. It was the kind of a home that only a man of wealth and culture would build and inhabit.

"Oh, look down there at that *Dream Place!*" exclaimed Keldora as soon as her eyes caught sight of it.

"Yes, indeed, and that's just where these two Gipsies intend to pitch camp for the night—and maybe longer," was Zenda's enthusiastic rejoinder.

"I am curious to know who inhabits it," continued Keldora as

she adjusted her telescope to her eyes and proceeded to scan it in true military style.

“Evidently some wealthy planter, who believes in living and who has taste and is educated and cultured,” added Zenda after a further survey of the place thru their field-glass.

And they were right in their diagnosis, as usual. It was the home of the fiery and proud old Captain Morgan Vancefield, a rich and eccentric river captain and planter and slave-owner on a large scale. He was born down on the White River, and his father came out to these wilds more than sixty years ago as the best way to terminate a long-enduring feud back in South Carolina. The Captain had plied the Mississippi, Ohio, and White rivers for more than thirty years, and made a big fortune by some lucky investments, and found the present place in one of his hunting trips along the White River, and was so taken with its natural beauty that he decided to get the land and several thousand adjoining acres and lay out a typical plantation on which to pass his declining years far away from the turmoil and hypocrisy of the cities. His wife had been a famous belle and beauty in her day, and also a noted violinist and contralto and no mean artist. The Captain in his earlier days had played the fiddle for the old country dances and the impromptu hops on his own boats. The Captain was a dead shot with the rifle or pistol, and feared neither God, man nor the devil. There were only two things that could make the dauntless Captain grow goose, flesh—a rattlesnake and the yellow fever. To fight bob-cats, bear, alligators and his own species was only recreation. He was a first-rate wrestler and boxer in his younger days, and never so happy as when Hell was a-poppin’. And when it came to the use of profanity, Captain Vancefield was a real artist—was away up in the Rembrandt class, and could swear in colors that would make Rubens and the rainbow look like kindergarten pikers. He had a son, Walden Ramsay Vancefield, and a beautiful and charming daughter, Pauline Eugenia Vancefield. The son was just twenty-five and the daughter twenty, and they were both chips off the old blocks, and their parents were very proud of them, but had never spoiled them. They were talented in music and art, and had been taught many useful things.

The Captain owned more than a hundred black slaves and their neat little cabins dotted the river bank for miles. The Vancefields were noted for their pride and wealth and broad, liberal ways. They were good to their slaves, and the Captain had often told them that

if they were dissatisfied he would free them and they might leave if they wished to. Only one ever sought his freedom in this way, and after about seven months up in central and eastern Missouri, he voluntarily returned to the Captain's and announced that he was satisfied to stay among real white folks like the Vancefields.

The girls rode down the bluff in a winding and round-about way, and soon came to the big entrance gate and then rode up to the front of the mansion and greeted the Captain himself, who was dozing and trying to read on the wide veranda.

"Good evening, sir," pleasantly greeted both the girls at once. "We have ridden far to-day and seek shelter for the night."

"Bless my eyes, if it isn't two beautiful young girls!" boomed the Captain in the old river days style. "To be sure, young ladies; 'light and rest your saddles. My home is at your service." And the aged man straightened up like the old chief that he was and summoned a couple of negro lads that were loitering near and ordered their horses to be taken to the barn and given the best of care.

"I am Miss Keldora Storm, of the Ozarks in southern Missouri, and this is my chum and school-mate, Miss Zenda Woodbine, of Arkansas. We are returning home from a three-year stay in school in Nashville," quietly explained Keldora in her rich and refined musical voice, which always gained her immediate attention and obedience.

"I'm Captain Morgan Vancefield," announced the Captain in his most dignified manner, "and I am flattered to have such distinguished guests to honor my home with their presence," continued the Captain in real Beau Brummel fashion. "Pray be seated, and I'll have your presence announced to Mrs. Vancefield and my daughter, Pauline. Here, Maggie, run along and summon your mistress and Miss Pauline, and say that we have company and for them to come at once."

Mrs. Vancefield and Pauline soon appeared and looked their astonishment when they discovered that their guests were total strangers and bore every mark of being young women of good breeding and culture. The Captain rose and gallantly presented them and made known their request for lodging and shelter for the night.

"I am pleased to meet you both, young ladies, and our home is open to you for as long as you choose to remain," cordially exclaimed the Missus.

Then Pauline came forward and gave them a warm welcome,

and she and Mrs. Vancefield conducted them to two beautiful guest chambers on the second floor; but they stated that one room would be plenty, as they preferred to sleep together. Mrs. Vancefield summoned a colored maid to wait on them, but this they laughingly declined, as they were only a couple of school-girls and used to waiting on themselves.

"Very well, my young dears; just make yourselves at home, and when you have rested, just come down below and make yourselves part of the family," kindly said Mrs. Vancefield, with a kind, motherly look and caressing tone that put the girls at ease.

"If you want anything, just ring for it," explained Pauline; "and we usually dine at 7 o'clock in the summer time."

"Thank you, dear," said Keldora; "you're so sweet and kind and just about my age I should guess," cooed Keldora in that soft and winning voice that never failed to reach the soul—whether the person had one or not.

Then the hostess and her daughter retired, and after the girls washed a bit and tidied up a little and made a few changes in their simple attire, they descended the broad and winding stairway with its deep and foot-kissing velvet carpets to the big front reception-room, where Pauline was lazily and idly dreaming on the great old Chickering piano and her brother was running over a new song that had just reached them from New Orleans. Walden had a deep and rich bass and baritone voice and he knew how to use it. Pauline introduced Walden, and then they all four fell to discussing the events of the outside world.

"I heard you singing as we came down, Mr. Vancefield, and I should be delighted to hear more of your wonderful voice," coaxed Keldora with her soft and soul-teasing voice and great velvet liquid eyes that just would not be denied.

"Oh! I only sing just a little with Sis and for my own amusement," easily and bashfully went on Walden; "but of course, as I'm a *Vancefield*, I cannot refuse any request of the fair sex," gallantly explained the young man as he arose and lazily sauntered toward the piano. "I have a song here that I rather fancy and it kind o' suits my voice."

Then he sang "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep" with a great deal of feeling and expression.

"Beautiful! Wonderful!" enthused Keldora. "Why, you really have a wonderful voice, Mr. Vancefield."

"Yes, and he knows how to use it, too," slyly chipped in Zenda by way of approval.

This greatly pleased the young man and his talented sister, who played the piano for him.

"I just know from your voice and face that you can play and sing," returned Walden, "and I should be delighted to hear you."

"And so would we all," enthusiastically exclaimed Pauline, and she arose from the instrument and signaled for Keldora to play for them.

"Like your brother, I just play a few chords and hum some of the old plantation melodies for my own amusement," bowed Keldora as she easily sauntered over to the piano.

Then she clouded up and just stormed all over the old Chick, and they knew at once that she was a master. After rendering a very pretty and difficult composition of Liszt, she sang one of her own little Ozark songs with all the old wild passion and feeling of the woods. The whole family were now in the parlor and gasping with entranced astonishment. They begged for more, and then she and Zenda sang one together, and the hypnotized auditors were entranced beyond all hope.

"You alls can come to dinnah now," announced Chloe, the maid of all work; and old Mam Sue was grinning just behind the girl and wiping the dusky perspiration from her ample black face. She was the cook and prided herself on knowing the art from syntax to harvest; and the excellent meal of fried White River catfish with new potatoes, June peas and string beans, a salad of nuts and celery and onions, strawberry shortcake, and real coffee and rich milk that was half cream, bore ample testimony to her accomplishments in the culinary line. They were all in a hungry and happy frame of mind and congenial, and did do full justice to Aunt Sue's dinner. Then they retired to the veranda, and after an hour of delightful converse, they begged the girls for more music. They went and got their banjo and guitar, and then for more than two hours the Vancefields never heard such divine music as they rendered. And it was not but a short time till the whole yard seemed alive with colored humanity, for the kitchen servants had spread the news among the other negroes that the guests were musicians and were playing the banjo and guitar; and the only way you can keep a negro from banjo music is to kill him about seven times.

"We hope you all can stay over for the shooting event tomorrow," enthusiastically exclaimed the Captain.

"What kind of an event will it be?" tentatively asked Zenda, with a roguish twinkle dancing in her beautiful Ozark eyes.

"The Shooting Club of this district meets here every three months, and we usually have a fine time," explained Walden.

"And that insufferable egotist, August Van Auber, thinks he is the whole works!" snapped Pauline, with a look of vengeance lighting up her dreamy brown eyes with a challenge.

"Well, dear, you know he has beat all our members and laid out all the visitors we have had, and he is somewhat justified in his egotism," gently admonished and explained Mrs. Vancefield.

"I don't care if he has," pouted Pauline. "He's no business being a vulgar braggart."

"By the way, who is this gentleman who shoots so well?" queried Keldora, with a saucy arch in her eyebrows.

"He's the only son and heir of old Abner Van Auber, of Cape Girardeau, and is a very rich young man, with ample means to gratify every whim; besides, he's badly spoiled, and don't consider any girl good enuff for him," carefully explained the Missus.

"In fact, he has had the very bad taste to boast of his prowess among the fair sex," explained Walden, "and of course Sis and most of the young women hereabouts consider him more or less of a cad."

"What he needs is to be taken down hard—and at his own game, too!" exclaimed Zenda, and her wonderful eyes were emitting sparks like an overcharged electrode.

"Yes, but who is going to do that little stunt, Miss Woodbine?" laughed the Captain, as tho his question had closed the meeting.

"I think that Zenda and I can take the afflatus out of Herr Van Auber's sails," quietly announced Keldora, and her dazzling eyes shone like the soft splendor of a September night on the Orinoco River.

"Oh! then you both shoot?" eagerly exclaimed the Captain.

"Well, I think I could hit a prairie if it were set up edgeways," laughed Keldora.

"And I just know I could hit the earth if I fell out of a balloon," coolly announced Zenda; then they all had a big laugh at this sally of wit.

"Oh, mother! but wouldn't it be great if these little school-girls could beat that conceited old thing?" clapped Pauline in an ecstasy of delight; "and especially as he has so slandered and ridiculed our sex." And she went over and put her arms around Keldora's neck and gave her a big squeeze; then she went over and

loved and petted Zenda and praised her for her courage and willingness to stand up and fight for her sex.

"Very well, then, Captain Vancefield, we accept your kind invitation to remain over and be your guests at the shoot to-morrow," warmly and quietly said Keldora.

"And if that Dutchman thinks he's the whole artillery, he's got to show us!" butted in Zenda in her vein of fine irony, that always produced a laugh.

So it was arranged for the girls to remain over a day longer than they had expected to. The whole family were delighted at their good luck in being so highly honored, and Pauline was so transported with joy that she didn't get to sleep that night till away after 2 o'clock in the morning; but she was up with the first note of the mocking-bird that floated down from the top of the tall old sycamore tree that stood like a sentinel between the house and the river.

Keldora and Zenda were also astir early, and hurried out to the near-by pasture to say "Good morning" to Prince and Wingie. They never neglected their horses, and as soon as the little animals saw the girls they kicked up their heels and ran up to the pastures gate and began rubbing their soft and velvet noses against their mistresses' faces and shoulders, and seemed as happy as a young kitten that has had all the milk it wants and is curled up under the old cook stove and enjoying the delicious aromas from the cooking foods. They petted the splendid animals and talked to them awhile in the mysterious love-languages they so well understood, and then Keldora whispered in Prince's ear that they would tarry there till the following day.

Prince reached over and rubbed his nose against Wingie's face and said: "Come on, dear; we're going to have a day off for our vacation; and I just know there is some extra fine grass down there along the creek." And Wingie seemed to understand, for she trotted off after her cavalier, and looked contented and happy.

Then they went back to the house, took their usual exercises and bath, and by that time old Mam Sue had a delicious and appetizing breakfast ready to serve. After breakfast the young people retired to the parlor and indulged in about an hour of music. Then the girls got their rifles and six-shooters from the barn and carefully cleaned them, and were all ready for the big shoot.

As early as 9 o'clock the members began to arrive and by 10:30 they and a few guests from other shooting clubs were all assembled.

Van Auber was arrayed in proper shooting costume, but most of the others were not. He was president of the club, and it was plain to see that he considered himself the Supreme and Mighty ITR. He was coldly and cynically polite, but had a condescending and important air about him that was a cross between a sneer and pity, and this made most people dislike him; but, owing to his great wealth and his prowess with any kind of a gun, he was tolerated and envied by most of the people.

No one had got close enuff to him to let him know that his titles were going to be disputed—and by a couple of school-girls. He would only have scoffed at such an absurdity anyway.

Promptly at 10 o'clock Van Auber called the club to order with due dignity and the proper amount of quiet insolence and cock-sureness.

The minutes were read and approved, and two new members were admitted.

The first thing was trap-shooting with clay pigeons, and of course Van Auber won easily, altho one of the visitors from Cairo had given him a hard run for his money. Then came some fancy pistol-shooting. Van Auber won again. Then Van Auber challenged Walden to a trial at shooting apples with a pistol. Walden was to throw an apple as high up in the air as he could and Van Auber was to shoot it before it reached the ground; then Van Auber was to throw the apple up and Walden was to shoot it. This was to be kept up till one of them missed. The prize was ten dollars. Walden missed his twentieth apple and Van Auber won again.

Poor Pauline was furious. She realized that Van Auber had challenged her brother more as a means of humiliating herself than anything else.

Zenda's blood was up to the danger-point, and she stepped forward and coolly addressed the winner.

"Mr. Van Auber, I think I can beat you at some real shooting," sarcastically challenged the little "Arkansaw Wildcat," as Van Auber afterward termed her.

"Indeed! And who are we, anyway?" coolly and insolently questioned the astonished man.

"She is Miss Zenda Woodbine, of Arkansaw, and *our* guest," announced the Captain, with a look in his steady blue eyes that made Van Auber change his tone and tactics immediately.

"Oh, indeed! then I'm delighted to meet you, Miss Wood-

bine;" and he made a very low and courteous bow, and turned his gaze at Keldora, who was standing near.

"And this young lady is Miss Keldora Storm, of our beloved Ozarks," continued the Captain as he presented Keldora to Van Auber. He bowed very low and courteously over her and she acknowledged it in pure Holland Dutch, much to his astonishment and delight. Then he turned to Zenda and politely inquired:

"Would Miss Woodbine be so kind as to explain what she calls '*real shooting*'?"

"To be sure, Mr. Van Auber. I presume you can ride?"

"Certainly—anything that goes on legs or wheels," and he smiled at his own humor.

"Very well, then; we'll try out a little pistol-shooting on horseback while the animals are running at full speed." The Captain had a private race-track that was just half a mile around it. "We will go and ride around the race-track out yonder and have persons stationed fifty feet apart and they will throw apples in the air for us to shoot, and we will wing the fruit before it reaches the ground," explained Zenda, with a saucy and tantalizing air that made Van Auber look silly and feel embarrassed at being thus challenged and made ridiculous by a mere slip of a school-girl that ought to be in pinafores yet. "That will be some real sport, Herr President;" and Zenda gave him a most provoking smile that made him inwardly furious.

"That will suit me all right, Miss Woodbine, and possibly I may be able to take some of the conceit out of you," sarcastically returned the baffled man.

"Yes—*p-o-s-s-i-b-l-y*," mimicked Zenda, to the delight of Pauline and most of the others.

"Oh! by the way, Mr. Van Auber, don't you think it would be more interesting and like real sport if we wagered a little money on it?" teased Zenda in her most provoking manner.

"To be sure, miss; but I didn't know but what you had scruples against betting," mocked the young man.

"Oh! I have, but I'm not using them to-day," fired back Zenda, with about thirteen per cent of interest added for good measure.

"Very well, then. I'll wager ten dollars that I defeat you at your own little game." And he drew himself up to full height and smiled condescendingly, with a mock bow toward both girls.

"I'm not a piker nor tinhorn, Mr. Van Auber. Let's make it three hundred dollars."

"Whew!" whistled the young man in genuine astonishment; "but you are a game little sport all right." And he gave her a keen and prolonged look of astonishment and admiration.

"I mean it, Mr. Van Auber; and here are three hundred dollars that say that you have slightly overestimated yourself—as your sex is inclined to do." This brought forth yells of applause from the entire assemblage, and poor Van Auber was for once in his proud and idle life completely taken down and annihilated—and by a mere school-girl. He dug up the necessary three hundred dollars and the money was placed in the Captain's hands as referee.

It was now the noon hour, and the Captain announced that luncheon would be served out under the big linden trees to the club and its guests.

This was a memorable social event in the annals of the Ozarks and about two o'clock the entire party and most of the servants and field-hands went out to the track for the big event.

Van Auber had ridden over there on a fine blooded animal, of which he was very proud, and which he often rode in his rambles over the countryside. Zenda and Keldora rode out to the track on their ponies.

There were to be eighteen apple-throwers stationed around the track, and each contestant was to carry three six-shooters, all loaded and ready. The two not in use were to be carried in the holsters of the saddles and taken out when needed and the empty ones put back in the holster. The apples were to be thrown high in the air when the rider was twenty-five feet away. If the contest was a tie, it was to be tried over again until one or the other failed to hit the apple.

"Ladies first," mockingly smiled the young man when everything was in readiness.

"Very well, monsieur," returned Zenda in perfect French and with a most provoking smile.

Zenda was dressed just as she was when she arrived there the previous day, and when she saucily and confidently rode Wingie out on the track and in front of the judge's stand, she certainly made a charming appearance and won all hearts—even Van Auber's.

"I am ready," she simply announced.

Then the judge fired a pistol as the signal to start. Zenda was off like the winds of Arizona, and the little mare seemed to understand that some very important contest was in progress, so she behaved perfectly and kept up an even and easy run.

Every one of the eighteen apples was hit and most of them very near their centers. Such yelling and applauding the Ozarks seldom heard before. She received an ovation when she made the round and never missed an apple.

Then Van Auber rode clumsily out on the track and signaled that he was ready. He looked pale and furious, but game to the last. He missed the first two apples entirely and just grazed the next three, then missed another one and grazed two more. Only two apples were shot thru their centers. The wild yells of derision that greeted him as he came under the wire completely took the egotism out of him. He hurried over to where Pauline was trying to squeeze Zenda to death, and, making a very low bow, contritely said:

"Miss Woodbine, you're a wonder—I'm only an amateur. Where did you learn to ride and shoot?"

"Why, in these dear old Ozark hills, where I was born and raised." And she gave him the first real smile of sympathy she had yet bestowed on him.

"Would Mr. Van Auber like to see some more real marksmanship?" politely inquired Keldora, with her most fetching smile.

"Well, really, Miss Storm, I don't know but what I've had about enuff for one day," stammered the flustered young man.

"Ah, you old *tinhorn* quitter!" sneered Pauline, and she fixed her glorious big brown eyes steadily on his handsome face. "I thot you were a *real* sport, Mr. Van Auber." And she continued to stare at him in that aggravating way that only a woman can stare.

This challenge and taunt in the presence of so many of his friends and brother members of the club got under his pride in a hurry, and he turned to Keldora and politely inquired what her idea of real shooting was.

"Why, it is this: I will put my two six-shooters in my hip holsters, lay my rifle down on the ground in front of me, and then I'll throw an apple up in the air, pick up the rifle and split the apple in two halves, and before the two halves reach the ground I'll draw my revolvers and put a bullet thru each half," calmly explained the young Suffrajet without batting an eyelash.

"Bah! the person doesn't live who can do that," disgustedly exclaimed the young man, who thot the girls were guying him and trying to humiliate him in the eyes of his friends and acquaintances. Then he lifted his cap and started to walk away.

"I'll bet you five hundred dollars I can do it," shouted Keldora after him.

"I'll accept that bet, miss, for I know you're just bluffing," and he indignantly reached for his wallet again.

"I never bluff on anything less than five aces and a few visitors from the royal family," shot the girl right back at him. This witticism brought out tremendous applause and many smiles at his expense.

Keldora fished out a five-hundred-dollar bill she had tucked away about her clothes for a rainy day, and it seemed that the wet *diem* had arrived. The money was placed this time in Colonel Jordan's hands, who acted as stake-holder and, with Captain Vancefield, umpired the game.

A fair-sized apple was brought forth and Keldora handed it to Mr. Van Auber to examine and to satisfy himself that it was solid and intact. He handed it back and nodded that it was O. K. Then she smiled and bowed to the assemblage and tossed the apple high in the air. She picked up the rifle with lightning quickness and without any effort split the apple in two almost even halves. Then she snatched her pistols and easily sent a bullet thru each half before it was within fifteen feet of the ground; and then, just for pure daredevilism and good measure, she fired a fourth shot and clipped one of the quarters in twain. This was too much for Van Auber. He threw up his hands and signaled for silence, and when it was granted him, he simply bowed and announced: "I resign as president of our club and also from the club. Good-day, ladies and gentlemen." Then he mounted his racer and was off—with his soul at half-mast and his pride trailing in the dust. Whether he returned to the Old Country or not was never known, but he was never again seen in the Ozarks.

Keldora and Zenda were queens again and everybody was crazy to meet them and entertain them. Pauline was just simply daffy over them, and Walden would have gladly laid down his soul for them to walk on.

The Cape Girardeau papers got the story and then the Paducah and Nashville papers printed it and commented on it. No one was more pleased than were Judge Bragston and the Governor of Tennessee. They sent copies of the papers to the girls, and each gentleman wrote a letter of congratulation and expressed his satisfaction.

That night at supper Pauline came in the dining-room with an arm affectionately wound around the girls' necks and declared:

"Papa, I'm just never going to let these girls leave us."

"I wish we could keep them, dear, for they would be a delightful addition to our family," fervently said the Old Man, and his soft blue eyes had a moisture in them.

"And I'd just give the world to have two more dauters," seconded Mrs. Vancefield.

"Well, they're always going to be my sisters, anyway," and Pauline unwound her arms in order to allow them to be seated at the table.

Old Mam Sue was an interested spectator that afternoon and the smile on her face when she brought in the supper was like the Mississippi River. "Golly! Massa Cap'n, I had to swat that fool niggah Joe this afternoon—him as what lives down thar by the big rock."

"Why, Mam Sue, what did Joseph do to arouse your righteous ire?" winked the Captain.

"Why, when he done larn that the little Missy Zenda had bet three hunderd dollars thet she could beat that poor white-trash of a Van Slobber, that fool niggah up and sez, sez he: 'Dat fool gal shuh looz her munny. Mistah Van dun beat all the white fokes and everbody wid de gun.' Den I haul off and hit dat black niggah right in his speakuh and tried to get my whole fist down his black froat;" and the old soul struck a Robert E. Lee and General Jackson pose and stormed out of the room.

They all had a big laff over this speech, and Walden dryly remarked: "You all sure have a champion in old Mam Sue."

"Yes, and in everybody else," added Pauline, with interest.

After supper a little music was indulged in, and then the Captain, the Missus, Pauline and Walden drove down to the river in the big family carry-all, and there they all embarked on a splendid and nifty little yacht that was the pride of the Vancefields and the envy of the nabors. The Captain, being an old river man and sea-dog, just couldn't live without some kind of a boat, so he had this little skipper built and equipped at Memphis a few years after giving up the river life. It was named *The Catfish*, on account of its rapid and graceful movements thru the water. The girls had their banjo and guitar along, and Pauline had her mandolin and Walden his violin; so the night was spent in music and song and just dreaming. The Captain and two of his servants managed the

boat, and the Missus was too happy to do anything but just dream and drink in the moonlight and music. They drifted down the river about five miles and then turned and came slowly back—not caring much whether they ever reached the shore again or whether the night ever ended—they were all so happy.

Just before leaving the boat, Walden managed to get Zenda alone for a moment and quietly said:

“Miss Woodbine, I should like to keep track of you. What do you say to an exchange of a few letters?” and he blushed like a new rose receiving the amorous kisses of the morning sun.

“I’m willing,” said Zenda simply; “and as I shall visit with Keldora for awhile, you may address me there.”

“How far is it to her home?” said the young man, with a new light dawning on his mind.

“About forty miles, I reckon;” and she could not quite subdue the blush that insisted on coloring her cheeks.

“Well, I can easily ride over there and visit you before you leave.”

“I shall be pleased to see you, Mr. Vancefield.”

Just then Keldora came looking for Zenda and announcing that the boat was anchored to the wharf and that it was time to go ashore.

When they reached home that night, the Vancefields all declared that it was the end of a perfect day—and the girls agreed with them.

“And to think, dears, that you defeated that egotist and braggart!” exclaimed Pauline, as she affectionately wished them good-night and pleasant dreams. And their dreams were pleasant, too—especially Zenda’s, for she admitted to herself that Walden was a real gentleman, and—handsome and good. What more could a sensible girl want?

After an appetizing breakfast that old Mam Sue had taken much pains to prepare and serve, the young people sang a few farewell songs while their horses were being saddled and made ready for the last lap on the way back home. Walden helped Zenda to mount and whispered some sweet nothings as he slipped her a little bouquet of beautiful pansies and wood violet.

“Oh, my favorites!” exclaimed Zenda. “I shall wear them for you.”

Poor Pauline was heartbroken when it was time to say good-bye; and the hardened old Captain turned away to hide his tears.

"God bless you all, honeys!" shouted old Mam Sue after them as the spirited animals were off like the wind.

Zenda slipped her flowers in her dress bosom and did not tell Keldora anything about them; but Keldora knew, for she was a good guesser as well as a crack shot.

"That's all right, dear. Mr. Vancefield is a fine young man and I approve of him. If he can capture your heart, I'll be your best man at the wedding;" and Keldora reached over and gave her little friend and pal a squeeze that was a whole sermon. "And what a dear little sister Pauline will make!"

"I guess you're right, Kel; anyway, I promised to correspond with him, and gave permission for him to visit me at your home."

"I'm so glad you did that, for I want papa and mamma to meet him."

This greatly pleased Zenda; and the rest of the trip was indeed a tangled dream of wild flowers and meadow brooks.

As they got a late start, they did not reach their home till 9 o'clock that night, but there was a full moon that night, and if you want to know all the possibilities of fair Luna in the capacity of an electric light plant, you've got to see her down in the Ozarks when she is full. Only a poet who is also an artist and a musician can understand and appreciate it. Their welcome home will always be one of the emerald and moonlit plazas in their minds. Talk about slaying the fatted calf!—that wouldn't have made a cheese sandwich.

The elder Storms were out on their big front porch, dreaming and loving in the moonlight as their old friend the Southwind crooned lullabies to them. All at once they were startled out of their reverie as horses' hoof-beats were heard coming up the tree-lined drive.

"Why, mother, who can that be this late?" and Colonel Storm strained his ears to catch and identify the sounds.

"Oh, Lex! could it be Keldora and Zenda?" and Mrs. Storm was on her feet and starting for the big arched and vine-clad gate—the entrance to their front yard and home.

"I do believe it is," he said. Then he was right after her, and they brought up at the gate simultaneously.

Kel was the first to see them and she sang out with her whole heart in her deep, rich voice:

"Hello, daddy and mamma! It is I and Zenda is with me." Then she leaped to the ground and made a dash for her parents and

just tried to hug and squeeze them to death; and their faces were joy-maps.

"Come here, Zenda, and meet my parents," said Keldora.

Mrs. Storm just gathered Zenda to her heart and loved and mothered her like she did her own chick, and remarked:

"Kel has written so much about you and told us how good you are and how she loves you, so you seem just like our dauter, too; and I want you to make yourself perfectly at home with us and also be our dauter—for there is always room in our hearts and home for anyone our little girl is fond of."

Then the Colonel took her in one arm and Kel in the other one and just squeezed and squeezed both of them and bade her welcome to their home and hearts.

"I am so glad, dauter, that you have found a real companion—a pal and comrade," said the Colonel.

"And, daddy," Keldora continued, "she is just my other self and is just as good as she is beautiful, and I just know she'll make you all laff yourselves to death, for she's funnier than a clown and has a wit that cuts like a bob-cat's front teeth."

"I'm very proud and happy that I now have two dauters;" and the Colonel gently bumped their pretty heads together, and asked if they had had any supper.

"Not yet, daddy," replied Keldora, "and we're just starving, too; so get busy and slice up the fatted calf." And they all had a big and contagious laff.

Mrs. Storm had already gone to the kitchen, and the delicious odor of frying ham and eggs floated out to them like a benediction.

The most of that night was spent in talking and asking the the girls a million questions.

It was plain to see that Lex and Veldena were both greatly pleased at the wonderful changes in their dauter. Kel was now indeed a young lady and had a finished gleam and an easy and graceful sparkle that made her irresistible.

"Mother, our cup is surely full to-night. Our darling is back home with us and exceeds in every way our wildest dreams and fondest expectations." And then Lex gathered Veldena up in his great manly arms and proceeded to squeeze her to death.

"Yes, dear love," replied Mrs. Storm; "and oh, I'm so glad she is heart-whole and hasn't had any foolish love affairs down there! and I'm so glad Zenda came with her—I wish we could keep her always!"

After a late breakfast next morning, Kel and Zen mounted their ponies, and Kel proceeded to show the wonderful place to Zenda. Zenda was in raptures over it before they had seen half of it.

The Storms planned to give a big reception in honor of their daughter's return, and most of the countryside were bidden to come; and they came with bells on, and joy was unconfined for a day and night. The girls were thus officially and properly brought out and introduced to everyone worth knowing, and their popularity spread like a flu epidemic or a church scandal in a small town. It was a fatted calf barbecue all right and passed into history as the greatest social event that ever took place in the Ozark country.

Every young swain wanted to call on the girls, but Kel and Zen both kindly and politely declined all such advances. Zenda knew *why* she declined—and Kel simply didn't have time to waste on the bumptious young critters; and the elder Storms were quite certain the neighborhood had no one who would be half good enough for Kel—and she agreed with them. So Keldora spent the next three years at home and employed her time helping her father and mother and pursuing many new studies and writing. Yes, she was bound to be an *author*.

CHAPTER XXII.

ZENDA HAS VISITORS AND BECOMES A SCHOOLMAM.

The next couple of months were a dreamland Arcadia to the girls. They just wandered around among the dear old hills and played and dreamed and got acquainted with all the birds and denizens of the forests. They would gallop away on their ponies, and always carried their banjo and guitar with them and their trusty six-shooters. They generally also carried a bag well filled with pencils and artists' materials, for they were both fond of sketching and were no mean artists. The weather and environment were ideal and the life romantic and idyllic, and oh, how they enjoyed it and blossomed as only perfect human flowers can bloom! And these were gala days for Lex and Veldena, and sometimes the girls persuaded them to be their guests of honor on these nomadic expeditions to the woods and eternal old hills. This pleased the elder Storms and made them feel like kids again. They would catch some brook trout and broil them on spits, and with some wild fruit that grew everywhere, and some native nuts that only had to be shaken from the trees, they feasted as only free and natural souls can feast. The soft mountain water, as clear as crystal, made a nec-

tar fit for the gods; and the shells of gourds and cocoanuts made the right kind of cups, and there were plenty of big oak leaves for saucers and napkins. It was the old primeval life in all its modern glory, and they knew how to live and enjoy it.

Zenda had promptly written and told her parents where she was and her intentions of making Keldora a prolonged visit before going to her Arkansaw home. Zenda was well provided with homes—and others were yearning and longing for her. The Woodbines only lived about seventy-five miles from the Storms, and Zenda's father wrote that he would ride over and carry her home with him early in August. It was only the last of June then, and that would give the twins plenty of time to visit.

"I'm real glad that your father is coming over and honor us with a visit," remarked Colonel Storm when he was informed of the news from Arkansaw.

"And, daddy, we'll just show him the time of his life!" exclaimed Keldora, with girlish glee.

"I've no doubt of it, my dears," dryly winked the Colonel at both the girls.

About the same time that Captain Woodbine's letter arrived Zenda also received another one that made her face outdo Rubens and the rainbow in color schemes. Of course it was from Walden, and the envelope bore the Vancefield coat of arms—a small steamboat rounding a bend in the White River and a bob-cat clinging to the mizzen-mast.

"All right, dear little pal," purred Keldora affectionately. "I'll just go and help mater with the dinner while you read your letter, for I know you want to be *alone*."

"Isn't she just the dearest girl in all the world?" mused Zenda to herself after Kel had disappeared. "She just seems to intuitively understand and know *everything*."

Zenda soon devoured her letter—her first love-letter—and then she read it again and again, and then kissed it and sacredly hid it away near her heart, and as it was too sacred for any eyes but Zenda's, we'll not intrude it on our readers. "Oh, pshaw!" I hear some of my girl readers exclaim. Never mind, girls; just wait till you receive a *real* sure-enuff love-letter and then you will respect Zenda's delicacy about having it made common property. And that afternoon Zenda asked to be excused, as she had a letter to write; and oh, what a letter it was, too! Walden never before knew how it felt to have a pair of sixteen-cylinder wings and no

clouds in the sky. He was too happy the remainder of that day to do anything but just dream—and refuse to eat or sleep. Pauline, the little feminine ferret, guessed his secret the first shot, and it was hard to tell which was the happier—she or her brother.

The next day Walden was up with the birds and hollyhocks, and after a light breakfast and an hour's horseback ride he took writing materials and locked himself in his den, and after about two hours' hard work he finally got a letter together that seemed about the right thing. Then he mounted his mare, Fanwing, and rode to the little town to mail it. He informed Zenda that he would set out early Saturday morning on Fanwing and try to reach the Storm home Saturday night, and would remain with them till the following Monday. When this good news was imparted to the Colonel and Mrs. Storm, they hastened to assure Zenda that their home was wide open to any of her friends and relatives, and that they would feel honored to have a visit from Mr. Vancefield. The Colonel had often heard of the Vancefields and knew them by reputation. This was only Thursday—and he wouldn't arrive till late Saturday night.

"Kel dear, how long will it be until Saturday night?" asked Zenda that evening after supper and while they were dreaming in the big grapevine swing out in the front yard. Then she leaned over and hid her pretty head of wild and tangled hair on Kel's shoulder and blushed like a wild poppy in the warm September sun.

"Why, Zenda! is it that far advanced already?" mocked Kel in her soothing mother-tone that Zenda always liked to hear; "if it is, I'm afraid you'll have to take something for it." Then Kel took Zenda in her arms and cooed to her and mothered her like a young mother does her first-born when it has stubbed its toe.

"You're just a darling, Kel, and I don't know what I'd do without you!" fervently exclaimed Zenda, and she just couldn't quite keep the tears away from her wonderful eyes.

"There, there, dear," said Keldora; "you are not going to do without me. We're never going to be very far or long apart, are we, Zen?"

"Not if I can have my way about it, dear, for I know I could never be half happy without you—the other half of myself," fervently replied Zenda as she cuddled up closer in Kel's arms and cooed like a happy baby when its mother fondles it and presses it closer and ever closer to her heart.

These two beautiful and wonderful girls had indeed grown into

one another until they were really one—never the slightest discord between them in more than three years of the greatest intimacy.

“But really, dear, I’m so glad it is Mr. Vancefield, for I’m sure he is just a grand young man and a real gentleman; besides, he comes from such good stock, and has a name equal to any of them; and then to think how delighted little Pauline and his parents will be! Yes, my child, it will be a splendid match, and you will have my choicest blessings,” lightly mocked Kel in her kind and facetious way.

“But, dear Kel, you must not help me count my chickens before even a feather is in sight,” and Zen smiled in her old ironical way.

“I think, if you’ll let me read Walden’s letter, I can find enuff feathers to make feather-beds for a whole family,” slyly smiled Kel; “and I believe that I could also detect the odor of *pansies* about it,” dryly winked Kel as she fastened her great, soft purple eyes on Zenda’s blushing face.

“Oh! what do you know about *pansies*?” exclaimed Zen, with several new shades of old colors suffusing her glorious face.

“Oh! nothing, of course,” mocked Kel; “I am possessed with the clairvoyant gift of seeing without looking;” and then she gathered her little pal up closer and closer and kissed her pretty brown hair that was hatched in the moonlight and tangled by the Southwind.

“Kel, dear, I’m just never again going to try and keep anything away from you.”

“That’s right, Zen; as I am your *other self*, you must have no secrets from me.”

“Oh! here you elves are,” bantered the Colonel as he came out and squeezed in between them on the old vine swing and gently circled an arm around each one and fondly squeezed them and then bumped their pretty heads together playfully. “What new mischief are you planning now?” went on the Colonel.

“Why, daddy, we’ve just been talking about the coming of Mr. Vancefield, and I’ve been telling Zen what a fine young man he is, and have been bestowing my blessing on them a little in advance of the event,” mocked Kel in her wonderful voice of musical fragrance.

“Well, indeed! you are rushing things a little, my child,” dryly remarked her father. “Perhaps Mr. Vancefield will have something to say about” it.

"Oh! no he won't, daddy; he's been shot right thru the center of his big heart and is just coming up here for Zen to bury him—and I'm going to officiate at the *obsequies*," mocked Kel in her finest vein of pleasant irony.

"Now, Colonel, I just think it's a shame the way you all tease me and make fun of me," pouted Zen, and the colors continued to play shadow-tag all over her beautiful face.

"There, there, little girl," said the Colonel; "I know how it feels to have the *fever* the first time, but we all have to go thru with it and take our medicine. Kel, don't tease the child any more, or she'll be so nervous and rattled she won't remember his name when he arrives."

Then they both proceeded to tell the Colonel what they knew about the Vancefields and the lovely time they had as their guests; and when they related how they lowered Mr. Van Auber's colors and made that egotistical young snob look like a thirty-cent piece that never had a 3 and borrowed its 0 from the Mound Builders, the Colonel just roared and roared, and then hugged them both again to his heart, and told Zen he was sure proud of her and was delighted that Kel had found her and brought her home; "for I sure need another dauter, and to hear of your exploits it would be difficult to tell which was the other; and if that young cub thinks of going home in less than a week, I'll waylay him and shoot him for a slacker!" boomed the Colonel.

"It is awfully sweet of you, Colonel Storm, to be so good to me and receive my guests like they were your own," warmly returned Zenda, and she squeezed the Colonel's hand and nestled her pretty head over on his shoulder.

"They are *my own*, and I know that Mr. Vancefield is the right sort and a gentleman or he would never have received an invitation from a girl like you; besides, it will take the three of us to show him all over the place, and a week is such a short time—at *times*," dryly winked the Colonel.

"And, Kel dear, what's the matter that you haven't found your Prince Charming yet?" asked the Colonel point blank.

"I don't know why he hasn't shown up yet, daddy dear, but he has not even appeared in my dreams; so I think you are doomed to have an old maid on your hands, daddy;" and Kel looked as serious as tho she were uttering a prophecy that was sure to come true.

"I wish I could always have you, Kel," and the Colonel sighed audibly.

"Of course you are going to *always* have me, daddy dear," said Keldora, "for I could not be happy without you and mamma and Zen. Even if I marry, my husband must come here and live where we can always be near one another. You have enuff land for a dozen men to farm, and he has got to agree to come here and live in our hallowed and wonderful Arcadia or he won't get me—so there!"

"That's the talk, dauter mine," returned the Colonel, "and I heartily agree with you; besides, I'll soon be too old for active work, and it would be so nice to have a *son* in my declining days."

"You're so sweet and sensible, daddy; no wonder I just worship you," replied Keldora.

So it was settled that if Kel ever married, she and her husband were to come there and live among the dear old hills and trees and brooks that knew her from infancy. No other place would be *home*.

MR. VANCEFIELD ARRIVES.

At last Saturday night rolled around, and after supper Kel and Zen went down to a big rustic seat among the vines and near the big gate that opened out on the woodland road that wound off toward the southeast. It would be up this road that their expected guest would come. And oh, how Zenda counted the minutes! Each one seemed a snail and inclined to stick to the soft summer air. But at last Kel shouted: "Oh, Zenda! I think I hear hoof-beats down the road."

Then it was hard to tell the hoof-beats from Zenda's heart-beats. She made a brave effort to control herself and appear calm, but it was no use—her nerves got away from her, and it was a lucky thing that Kel was there to help her at the critical moment. Kel saw him first and shouted a welcome that put him at his ease.

"Welcome to our home, Mr. Vancefield — *The Dreamlands!*" and Kel hurried out to give him her hand, while Zenda was just behind her and trying to outblush the young man—which was quite useless.

"And—I am also—so—pleased to—to—meet you again, Mr. Vancefield," stammered poor Zenda, and she timidly held out her dainty white hand, which he nervously grasped and almost forgot to let go again.

"I'm sure delighted to meet you all again!" easily exclaimed

the young man, "and the long ride has only whetted my appetite for such an Arcadia as this. Miss Storm, you must have just dreamed this delightful Valhalla!" exclaimed the young man in tones of entranced delight. "Such an arbor! such a yard and such flowers! and such soft and dazzling moonlight! No wonder you're a poet and dreamer."

"Come down to the earth, Mr. Vancefield, and let's go up to the house and meet my parents and have some supper," happily remarked Kel in her matter-of-fact way.

"Supper!" exclaimed the entranced traveler; "why, all this beauty and moonlight and the fragrance from your seas of flowers is enough food for the gods!" and he continued to gaze in every direction like one bewildered. "Of course, I've had supper—*yesterday!*" and then they all had a big laff, which kind o' put Zenda a little more at ease.

"We knew you'd be more or less starved," sweetly cooed Zenda as she shyly slipped her soft little white hand thru his offered arm, and with Kel politely gripping his other arm he had no other alternative except to obey orders—which he meekly and happily did. He was soon presented to the Colonel and Mrs. Storm, who received him with a warmth and courtesy that made him forget his first nervousness, and soon the girls had him in the dining-room devouring a dainty little supper, which they had especially prepared for him; and when he was about half-way thru, Kel slipped away to the parlor and began to play some sweet old dreamy waltzes, while Zenda was left alone to attend to his supper. And oh, how that divine and flower-scented music from the soul of old Chick did float thru the house and hypnotize the lovers! It's true they didn't need anything to hypnotize them but their own sweet embarrassment, but Kel wanted to show him that he wasn't just dreaming—he was sojourning in a real Arcadia—a *flower-tangled Valhalla*.

The Storms were noted for their hospitality—to either friend or worthy foe. Kel had arranged for one of the colored boys to be near the gate, but discreetly out of sight, to take care of the gentleman's horse when he arrived. He arrived a little after 8 o'clock, but the night was too glorious to think of plebeian things like sleep, so they adjourned to the big grapevine swing out in the front yard, and with their banjo and guitar they serenaded him till the moon positively refused to look on any longer. It was a night to ever stay green in their memories.

Walden was so happy he did not know whether he was on

earth or not, but as long as Zenda was with him it did not matter at all where he was—it was Heaven anyway.

What an artist *Love is!* What fadeless pictures it paints on the hearts of youth; and how it can tie hearts together with rainbows and weave garlands that never fade!

They soon made plans for the next day, and then Keldora excused herself until she went and saw if everything was ready for Mr. Vancefield's retirement. And the dainty and exquisite way the girls had his room dolled up was enuff to make anyone happy. He had never before seen anything like it; and his dreams that night were a wilderness of tangled vines and flowers singing in the soft and radiant moonlight.

As soon as Keldora was out of ear-shot, he reached over and found one of Zenda's little quivering hands and reverently pressed it to his lips. She looked so confused and happy he gently gathered her in his great athletic arms and exclaimed:

"Little Moonbeam! My own sweet *Soul Dream!* As Nature intended us for each other, I now claim you for my very own. My love and soul are yours. Will you be mine for all time to come?"

"Yes, Walden. Our dreams have come true. I am yours." And then she drooped her pretty head over on his shoulder and he took her in his arms and they sealed their plighted love and vows with a long and lingering Vast Forever kiss that filled their future lives with the melted music of the tangled vines and moon-kissed flowers. They had just finished the *séance* when Keldora returned and sweetly announced that everything was in readiness when Mr. Vancefield was ready to turn in.

"Miss Storm," said Walden, "won't you congratulate us? Your little pal and I have decided to travel the same road thru life;" and he looked proud and happy and about three feet taller.

Zenda hid her happy and blushing head on Kel's breast, and the little Suffrajet, after squeezing Zen a minute, got up on the seat and, placing a hand on each of their happy heads, solemnly remarked: "I bless thee, my children. May all the good things of life attend thee."

Then they all arose, and Walden and Zenda followed Kel to the house, and he was shown to his room and bidden good-night and pleasant dreams. The girls then retired to their little flower-embroidered nest and were soon asleep in each other's arms.

The breakfast next morning was an artistic affair that could never slip away from memory. Kel and Zenda both got up early

and helped Mrs. Storm and Aunt Millie (*the old family servant*) prepare the meal and arrange the table and decorate the room with flowers, etc. Then Kel went out in the yard and whistled and chirruped for her little feathered friends to come in and sing for them among the vines while they ate breakfast, and they came—a hundred or more of them, and oh, how they sang and gamboled among the vines and flowers that were twined and woven everywhere! They always knew just what Keldora wanted and just loved to help her. She had played and sung with the birds so much they all knew her and loved her.

Walden was astir early, and after taking his bath and carefully dressing himself, he quietly slipped out and took a turn down thru the wonderful old orchard and gathered a bouquet of *pansies*—Zenda's favorite flowers. By this time he had an appetite for breakfast—a dainty and appetizing meal of strawberries and rich and soul-teasing cream, fried spring chicken, with new potatoes in cream, June peas and lettuce, native nuts, graham gems, and the kind of coffee with whipped cream that paints landscapes on the brain of man.

And oh, how those little songsters did carol and gambol among the vines all over the room while the family lazily enjoyed the meal! The big windows were all open, and the fragrance of the flowers pervaded the room from all directions.

"Colonel Storm, this is indeed Valhalla!" exclaimed the young man—utterly entranced beyond expression; "and how in the world did you ever entice all those beautiful birds in here to act as an orchestra?" continued the amazed young man.

"Ask Kel there," laconically replied the Colonel.

"It is all a part of her witchery," explained Mrs. Storm, amused at the young man's bewilderment. "The birds and everything else around here are her willing slaves and obey her slightest wish," continued the proud mother.

"And nobody knows half how wonderful she is," loyally chimed in Zenda. "It just seems to be born in her;" and Zen reached over and squeezed Kel's hand affectionately.

"It is certainly wonderful!" reiterated the puzzled young man. "How I should love to have my parents and sister see this wonderful place—this Paradise of tangled vines and flowers—of music and love and contentment!" went on Walden, forgetful of everything but the beauty and wonder of it.

"Mr. Vancefield, we should be delighted to meet and entertain

your people," courteously and warmly exclaimed the Colonel, "and we hope you can bring them over and honor us with a visit."

"Thank you, Colonel. I shall certainly arrange to bring them soon," was the hearty response.

"And oh, daddy! what a time Pauline and Zenda and I could have together here! She is such a charming girl; and if we hadn't been in such a hurry to get home and see you all again, we'd have remained longer with them."

After breakfast, the three youngsters took their instruments and mounted their horses and set out to explore the place and see all its wonders; and oh, what a day of joy and music and love! Kel left the lovers alone enuff for them to enjoy the sweet and wordless joys of their new and wonderful love. Even Prince and Wingie understood and luffed in their sleeves; and all the birds seemed to know the news and rejoiced with them. And thus they wandered and loved and dreamed for a whole week, when Walden insisted he had to return home. He left his heart with Zenda and took hers home with him. He came again in two weeks and remained from Saturday night till Monday forenoon.

The second week in August Zenda's father rode up and made the Storms a three-days visit, and carried Zenda home with him. The Captain and the Colonel became staunch friends from the start and agreed on everything.

Zenda had not yet named the wedding-day and in the meantime she agreed to teach the school where Kel made such a hit with Jeremiah. They had not had any school for seven months on account of the difficulty of getting a suitable teacher; and Zenda accepted it more as a means of being with Kel than for any other reason. Her father was a large land-owner and well-to-do farmer; besides, Zenda had some money of her own that she had won on the races and from Van Auber. And then this would make it much easier for Walden to visit her. She returned the first week in September to begin her school-work, and she was a hit from the start. The kids all loved her and the older boys would have loaned her their souls to walk on.

On Walden's second visit it was arranged for them to get married the following May, when her school would be out.

During the holidays Zenda had a two-weeks vacation, and Walden came up and brought his parents and sister and they remained the guests of the Storms for a week, and oh, what a time of feasting and enjoyment!

Captain Vancefield and Colonel Storm were congenial from the start, and the old Sea Dog regaled them all with wonderful tales of his life on the river as a steamboat captain. There never was a more congenial party, and the week slipped away like a winged dream.

The Storms returned the visit of the Vancefields early in May, just after Zenda's school was out, and they all enjoyed another delightful week together and on *The Catfish* almost every night. The Vancefields had a beautiful and wonderful place, and they all enjoyed themselves.

Kel and Zenda persuaded the Vancefields to let Pauline return with them and to remain up there till the wedding took place, which would only be two weeks off; and oh, how happy she was, and what a beautiful time the three girls did have together helping Zen get ready for the event that would give Pauline a new sister!

The Vancefields all came up to attend the wedding, and then carried Pauline home with them.

Captain and Mrs. Woodbine came up for the event, and carried Walden and Zenda home with them for a week's visit; and then Walden and Zen returned home *via* the Storms' abode and paid them another visit.

CHAPTER XXIII.

KUT'S SEARCH FOR BRINKLEY.

It has been quite a while since we left Kut in Butte, Montana, and now we will return thither and see how the young man succeeded in his search for the villain who robbed him of his precious little Canary—his own darling wife—and, besides that infamous act of treachery, robbed them of all their money with which they planned their home and future; and to think that he would be so lost to all instincts of humanity as to sell her to the White Slavers! Kut only had one object in living—now that his wife was gone beyond recall—and that object was to avenge her wrongs and death. Such a hyena-serpent as Brinkley was not fit to live, and no jury in the world would convict him for ridding the world of such a scourge and menace.

Kut had carefully disguised himself as a ruff miner with flaming red hair, and in the proper togs and with the usual tools and outfit of a prospecting miner, he strolled around Butte for about a month and looked the place over carefully for a clew to Brinkley. Finally he found that the skunk had been there and had procured

a position in a big store, but had only remained about a week, when he was caught stealing from the company and summarily discharged. Of course, he left no trace behind him, but Kut reasoned that he would never return to the East, and especially not to Kentucky. So Kut packed up his kit of tools and moved on to Helena, the capital of the State, and a live and wide-open town, where life was free and easy—and money plentiful. He secured a room in a quiet part of the town, and began to comb the place for the bird of ill-omen he was seeking. On the third day he was rewarded with success.

Mr. Brinkley was at the teller's window in one of the city's banks, but carefully disguised. Kut never thot of that contingency, and if it hadn't been for a peculiarity of the rascal's speech, he would have escaped recognition, for he had so altered his appearance that he appeared like a man in the early fifties. Kut winked the other eye, and realized that he was not the only one who had learned the art of disguise.

Brinkley was known in the bank as Charles D. Webber, and by his courteous and pleasant ways and devotion to his duties was rapidly becoming popular. He also had considerable cash, it seemed, and had made a deposit in the bank of thirty thousand dollars. This fact also increased his popularity, and he was regarded as a man of large means who was seeking some good and safe investments, and who had taken a small position more to have something to do than anything else. It also gave the bank complete confidence in him, and he was soon trusted and widely introduced in business and social circles. He was a devout church attendant, and always at Sunday-school, where he taught a class of young men in the mysteries of godliness and the beauties of an upright and Christian life. He was soon considered a model man; but he declined to talk about his antecedents, and merely stated that he had lost his wife and only dauter and it was a painful reminder of them and his happy home to speak of the past, therefore he preferred not to discuss the past, with its eternal shadows. This seemed so reasonable that his friends and acquaintances delicately refrained from thus wounding him. Oh, yes! he was a slicker all right; but every crook betrays himself sooner or later. He didn't seem to care at all for the smiles and society of the fair sex, and this, in itself, was a good disguise for anyone who knew him. However, Kut soon satisfied himself that the cuss was preparing a *coup* of some kind, but was playing his hand with the skill of a master gambler. He always left the bank with the other officials and employees, and was quietly living

at the principal hotel—but two blocks away. He never went out at nights, and avoided the office and lobby.

It puzzled Kut how to get at him and make a get-away at the same time. He couldn't walk into the bank or hotel and simply shoot the skunk; that would mean his arrest and perhaps a long term of imprisonment or a lynching-bee on the spot. He must wait and watch Mr. Brinkley's game and see if Fate wouldn't let him sit in at a more favorable time.

So Kut bought a burro and packed his prospecting outfit on the animal and lit out for the hills—apparently; in fact, he had a near-by place in which to conceal the animal while he altered his appearance and returned to town to watch Brinkley. How he hated to lose sight of the cuss! After a week of watching, he concluded to find a safe cave in the hills near the town and fit it up and have it handy when he needed a safe retreat in a hurry. He soon found an ideal place where Old Nick himself could not find it with an earthquake and a search-warrant. The entrance was completely covered by a thick growth of underbrush and trees and boulders, and by moving one of the big stones which was nicely balanced so it could be safely and easily manipulated, he found a cave that consisted of four big rooms that just suited his purpose, for he could conceal his burro therein as well as himself; besides, he could furnish the place and do cooking and be quite comfortable. With the aid of his burro, he soon had the place nicely and comfortably furnished with plenty of blankets and bedding and cooking utensils, and well provisioned with plenty of grub and books to read, in case he was compelled to remain out of sight for a long time—after pulling off his stunt.

Kut had become quite a student, and had read and studied everything he could get hold of, and was fast becoming a scholar. He could now converse correctly and intelligently with the best of them; and when it came to dolling himself up and making a proper front, he was the candy kid itself—thanks to the barn-stormers. And he was rapidly learning the mining business, and had the banking game pretty well in hand. He was rapidly becoming familiar with the ways of the police and other officials; in fact, he absorbed everything in the knowledge line and smacked his lips for more. He also found that he was popular with the women-folks wherever he went or worked. If it hadn't been that his soul was bent on vengeance, he might have remained up in Minnesota and hooked up with Valleja, the old farmer's yinta, for he saw that she was a fine

girl and loyal to the ones she loved; and while he was a real gentleman and not a bit vain, he could not help seeing that the girl liked him and had given him every opportunity to play heart-marbles for keeps, if he was so inclined.

Kut had that deep and inherent respect for all good women that Southerners have; and in the great and boundless West it is the first law of the land that all good women must be respected and defended, and Kut was ever ready to do his share in keeping that law intact. He had soundly thrashed a smart Alec and rounder in Minnesota when he was with the barn-stormers on account of the insinuating remark the cad had made about a member of the company as she came out of the post-office one day. "Huh! that's one of them show-girls—anybody can get next to them," sang out the cur as the girl was quietly leaving the post-office. But Kut happened to be in the lobby at the time and overheard the unmanly remark. This sent Kut's stock away up among the players and they were all admirers of him from then on. And when the marshal of the town reported the circumstances to the mayor, that individual sent his compliments to Kut and thanked him for his manliness.

As Kut had considerable musical talent, he bought a banjo and guitar and took them to his rendezvous, so he could while away the lonely hours with music when he got tired of reading. He had rendered solos on these instruments when he was with the barn-stormers, and his skillful and original way of playing always brot him encores. Sometimes he would play with some of the others.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SERIES OF MYSTERIOUS ROBBERIES.

All over Montana and adjacent States there had been a series of bold and reckless train and bank robberies within the past six weeks, and the officers seemed utterly unable to apprehend the desperadoes. Sometimes a lone highwayman would suddenly appear in a town and during the noon hour walk into the bank and ask to have a bill of large denomination changed, and when the cashier or other clerk returned with the change he found himself gazing down the long and shining barrel of a .45, and politely he was asked to loan the holder of the gun all the funds the bank had on hand, and to please be quick about it. On other occasions there were two of them, but they were always polite and used correct language, which indicated that they were men of education. Then, when the banks were all

closely guarded, they would suddenly change their plans a little and hold up a train or stage; but they always showed the same politeness and never used profanity, like the typical robber employs on such strenuous occasions. When their work was done, they always politely bade their victims good-day in perfect French. Their program of procedure was never varied, except in one case when they were holding up the stage, and a Jew drummer tried to expostulate to them in the Yiddish tongue, and then they scowled at him and cussed him in excellent Spanish. It was always two of them or one operating by himself—never more, and their methods were almost precisely alike. As soon as their work was completed they immediately disappeared, as tho the earth were in cahoots with them and swallowed them up.

Two people were particularly puzzled by these mysterious robberies and the unusual manner in which the deeds were accomplished—Mr. Ralph Brinkley and Mr. Kut Badd. At first Kut believed that the lone highwayman was Brinkley, but he soon learned that Brinkley had been at his post at the same time the lone operator had pulled off a robbery one hundred or more miles away. Of course, Brinkley did not dream that Kut had ever done such a thing as rob a bank or hold up a train and he had no idea that Kut was in the West. Brinkley was nervous on account of his own deposit, and he feared to rob the bank and try to skip, as he was planning, for fear the train on which he was getting away would be robbed and he would lose it all at one fell swoop. The rascal was in a quandary, and his nervousness was becoming plainly apparent. He also feared to withdraw his funds at that particular time, for he knew it would cause considerable comment and possibly suspicion, and above all things he didn't want anyone to suspect him just then. "Fetchtake the blamed fools anyway!" he murmured to himself one evening when he reached his room and began to read another thrilling account of a bank held up in a near-by town.

Another thing that was worrying the rascal and causing consternation in banking circles was the fact that the people all over the State were withdrawing their deposits from the banks, lest they might lose them by a bank robbery. Everybody was blaming the officers and calling them a lot of mollycoddles and incompetents. Why didn't they catch these gentlemanly outlaws? What were they doing to earn their salaries? and like queries. "Perhaps they were dividing with the outlaws," suggested one man who had lost about thirteen hundred dollars in a bank robbery and was very

much disgusted with the officers. Anyway, the people were getting panic-stricken and desperate.

On a certain Friday the officers of the banks in four near-by towns had sent the bulk of their deposits, amounting to about three hundred thousand dollars, to the Helena National Bank for safe keeping, believing that the outlaws would hardly dare attack that bank and right under the shadow of the State-house and under the Governor's eyes. This was a streak of good luck that Brinkley had not foreseen nor dreamed of, and he chuckled to himself with extreme satisfaction when he learned of it. He had just recently been promoted to cashier and now was one of the leading spirits in Helena's banking circles. This bank was also one of the depositories of several of the big mining companies and smelters, so it was now in a rather plethoric condition, and Brinkley realized that the hour for him to act had arrived.

The president of the bank had been called home at noon the next day, Saturday, by the illness of his wife, and would not be back any more that day. He asked Brinkley to stay and see that everything was properly locked up and put to rights before leaving. This was Brinkley's long-awaited-for opportunity and he seized it like a hungry trout does a worm. He managed to slip out four hundred thousand dollars and carried it to his room. That night he intended to pull his freight and blow quietly away.

That very Saturday Kut blew into the bank just before closing time to get a twenty-dollar bill changed, and he noticed how very nervous Brinkley appeared to be and how he furtively watched his two clerks. Kut had also learned in some way about the heavy deposits of the naboring banks the day previous, and his astute mind soon realized that Brinkley would not let such an opportunity slip by. Kut also knew the time of every train and stage in and out of Helena, for it was a part of his business to know these little details. A fast train was due to pass there at 2 o'clock a. m., and Kut would have bet his last dollar that Mr. Brinkley would be a passenger on it, but in another disguise; so he hurriedly made his arrangements to also go bye-bye on that toot-toot; and, as usual, he had bet on the right nag again.

Kut had disguised himself as a prosperous cattleman about sixty years of age, and assumed the proper and careless swagger of the cattlemen of that day. Here his theatrical training stood him well in hand again.

Kut swaggered back thru the two Pullmans, and soon located

his bird, who was carelessly enjoying a daily newspaper and seemed to have no cares in all this world of cares. His lazy and careless indifference was well assumed, and Kut did not know for certain that he was really Brinkley, and he must be sure. He went on back in the smoking compartment, and soon found the big black porter busy with his duties.

"Say, porter, how would you like to have this twenty-dollar gold-piece rattling around in your pocket?" asked Kut.

"Golly, boss! yuh all's foolin' wid me, I guess," replied the porter.

"No, indeed, I'm not fooling with you, Sam," said Kut.

"How's yuh all know my name's Sam?" asked the negro in bewilderment.

"Oh! I just guessed it, Sam," replied Kut. "Now look ahere: you take a peep in the car up there and see if you see that old cattleman up there on the left."

"Shuah, boss," continued Sam; "I'se done looked him ober before yuh come."

"Now listen, Sam," explained Kut, "I'm going up there and take the second seat back of him, and after a little while you come putterin' around and commence fixin' up some of the berths, and by a very awkward movement manage to stumble and fall ker-plunk over on him, and then beg his pardon and apologize and try to keep him in conversation as long as you can. That's all, Sam, and then the twenty-dollar gold-piece will be yours."

"But what's yuh all want me ter do such a foolish thing as dat fer?" asked Sam. "Besides, ther old duffer might shoot my whole block off."

"Never mind what my object is," continued Kut; "and I'll be on hand to see that he don't do anything more serious than swear a little."

Then Kut swaggered in and ker-plunked himself down in the seat back of Brinkley, who was also made up as a prosperous and elderly cattleman from Wyoming. He spread out a paper and proceeded to read.

Sam soon appeared and gave Kut a sly wink, and then caught his foot in the aisle carpet and sure did do an elegant job of falling all over Brinkley. The rascal was so completely taken by surprise that he forgot himself and blurted out in his own natural tone of voice and did call that darkey down properly. Sam was profuse in his apologies, and soon had the irate man partly pacified. Brink-

ley jumped up and went in the lavatory to rearrange his tie and make-up, which had become slightly disarranged.

As soon as Brinkley was gone, Kut slipped the twenty-dollar gold-piece to Sam and also three more twenties, and whispered to Sam to go back in the vestibule between the Pullmans and pull the cord and stop the train as soon as he heard a shot, and have the doors ready to swing open. The darkey looked scared, but Kut threatened to kill him if he disobeyed in the least or said a word to anybody.

Brinkley soon returned and spoke pleasantly to Kut and laffed at the porter's awkwardness. It just happened that the car had only one other passenger and he was calmly snoring up near the front end and did not hear the rumpus.

Kut whipped out his Bowie-knife and grabbed Brinkley by the throat with lightning quickness, and hissed in his startled face: "Brinkley! you damned scoundrel! I've found you at last, and you are still up to your old tricks!" Then he plunged the awful knife up to the hilt in the scoundrel's black and crooked heart, and it was all over with Mr. Ralph Brinkley. He sank a bleeding and quivering mass of flesh to the floor, and expired instantly.

On hearing the altercation, Sam had peeped in and witnessed the ghastly spectacle, and his terrified eyes bulged like four moons all rising on the same schedule.

"He deserved it, Sam," said Kut, "and if you don't keep still about it, I'll cut your black throat from ear to collar-button. Remember, you never saw this at all. Here is a hundred-dollar bill; and pull that cord and get the doors open for me quick, for I forgot something and must go back and get it." Then Kut gathered up the two leather suit-cases Brinkley had stuffed full of money, and dropped from the train. As soon as he was off, Sam signaled to go ahead.

In about five minutes the conductor and brakeman came back to find out who stopped the train and why it had been done. They had already ascertained from the engineer that he had received the proper signals to stop and to start again.

Sam was curled up in the smoking apartment and snoring like a sixteen-cylinder buzz-saw eating its way thru a knotty hickory log. He didn't even know the train had stopped; and how astonished and terror-stricken Sam was when the conductor took him in the coach and pointed to the dead man!

"And here you were asleep on duty and did not know that a

passenger had been killed and the train stopped by the murderer so he could get off," said the conductor.

"Some porter, you are!" sneered the brakeman, who did not like Sam.

"Can't help it," apologized Sam; "there wuz nuffin' tu do, as the two gemmens said they didn't wish to sleep, but preferred to sit up and read; and I wuz powerful sleepy," went on the black.

When the conductor and brakeman had gone forward, Sam felt of those precious gold-pieces and that velvety one-hundred-dollar bill, and chuckled to himself: "Huh! just wait till I get back tuh St. Paul—but won't I show dem tinhohns down at der Ryan Hotel how *ter* roll de bones!"

"Dem tinhohns" were the colored porters and waiters at the Ryan hostelry, with whom Sam usually shot craps when he was off duty and had two bits to sit in the game. Sam now felt like a real sure-enuff sport with all that dough in his jeans, and only had contempt for pikers—the gamblers who matched pennies or pitched coppers for the cracks.

The corpse was carried on to Butte and there turned over to the coroner and authorities, but none could identify it; then it was shipped back to Helena, where the bank officials finally identified it as their missing cashier—Charles D. Webber. His surreptitious flight in the middle of the night and the taking of all his belongings was evidence that it was he who looted their bank; but *who* was the Nemesis that so suddenly overtook the rascal and meted out to him such summary justice? That was the question in every mouth, but no answer was forthcoming. Some allowed it was the lone highwayman, but it was totally lacking in any of the earmarks of his work; besides, it was as plain as day that robbery was not the object of the attack, for Brinkley's gold watch and diamond stud were not taken, neither were the other passengers molested. It was a mystery that continued to mist. And furthermore, no trace of the murderer and the missing money could be found. The earth just seemed to have swallowed him up. Poses were out all over the State searching for him and the other three robbers, but no results were obtained.

Kut had very closely estimated about how long it would take him to get Brinkley and leave the train, and as the train was running eastward and right in the direction of Kut's rendezvous, which was about twenty miles out from Helena, and in a very wild part of the foot-hills, he had secreted his faithful burro at about the

right place. When he left the train, he only had about a quarter of a mile to go to reach his pack-animal. Some close reckoning, eh? Well, Kut was noted for his astuteness and abilities to make estimates and pick winners. He quickly strapped the two big suitcases on the burro and packed his other purchases and blankets carefully over them, so he had all the appearances of a *bona fide* prospector. As he only had about five miles to travel back in the hills, it didn't take him long to make camp and soon have a steaming hot dinner ready. After his meal, Kut carefully opened the valises and counted the money, and it totaled up to a little over four hundred and forty-five thousand dollars!

"Whew!" whistled Kut to himself, as he folded his arms and viewed the piles and piles of greenbacks and bank-notes and gold-pieces. "But, Kut, old boy, as Brinkley has paid the penalty of his crimes, this money must all be returned to the bank—even if you do run your neck in the halter by returning it and making explanations." And then he sat down and picked up his guitar and began to softly and reminiscently play some of the old love-songs that he and Canary often played together. "It was an awful job, but it had to be done," he said; and then he threw himself down among the great soft blankets and soon was sleeping soundly and contentedly.

The following Saturday he was up early and, with his pack-mule, was soon wending his way to town for supplies and news. The weather was now very cold, and considerable snow was on the ground and more falling. He laid in a good stock of supplies, and got all the papers for the past week and several novels and other reading matter, and then slowly meandered his way back "home," as he facetiously called his cave. He soon devoured the papers and learned that Brinkley had only been identified as "Webber," and as his antecedents were unknown, it was presumed that it was his first and only offense. The bank gave him decent burial; and the event was slowly passing into history as another unsolved mystery.

If the bank only had its money back, they could almost feel sorry for the erring cashier and revere his memory. How to return it and extricate himself was some problem, we must admit, and Kut was taking some time to think it over from every angle, and the more he pondered the more difficult it seemed.

After about two weeks of silence, the three bold and polite highwaymen resumed their operations, and seemed bolder and more tantalizing than ever. They even relieved the sheriff of his official

badge and credentials one day when they held up the stage on which that brave officer was a passenger. Before leaving, they offered him cigars and kindly advised him to try and get a job herding *sheep*. This was the limit in insolence and polite badinage, and the sheriff vowed all sorts of vengeance on their heads, for he became the butt of ridicule for all the joke-smths, and his humiliating experience was a sweet morsel for his political opponents—as the sheriff was out for re-election. If they could only get the man who killed Webber out after these bold and taunting outlaws, they might hope for success; but Kut was out of the heart-cutting business and deeply regretted that he ever had to resort to it. The awful look of fear and terror on Brinkley's face and the unutterable groan that escaped him as the knife pierced his craven heart still persisted in haunting Kut's mind and dreams. It's a terrible thing to have to take human life, but sometimes it seems necessary.

We shall now ask our readers to leave Kut alone with his problems for awhile, and accompany us back to the dear old Ozarks, for our friends down there are making history at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER XXV.

WALDEN AND ZENDA GO TO MONTANA.

Walden and his bride returned to the old Vancefield mansion near the White River, as his father and mother simply would not hear of their going elsewhere to live.

"We've just gained another dauter, Walden, and as there is plenty and oceans of room here for us all, it would be so cruel for you all to go off and leave us;" and poor Mrs. Vancefield and the Captain looked so distressed at the very thought of losing Walden and Zenda that they decided to stay—"for awhile anyway," consented Walden, and Zenda agreed with him. Then the Captain and his wife and Pauline all tried at the same time to squeeze Walden and Zenda to death.

"It's certainly sweet of you all to care so much for us," blushed Zenda as she hid her pretty head on Walden's breast and slipped an arm around Pauline and just sighed with happiness; and then the Captain and his wife took her in their arms and just squeezed and loved her until she was ready to cry with delight.

"And it's more than sweet of you to come back to us and be our dauter and help comfort us in our declining days," softly blurted the Captain, and his wife echoed his sentiments, and said she had always wanted another dauter.

"And Walden," pouted Pauline, "you're just not going to have my new sister all to your old selfish self, either. I'm to have her half of the time." And Pauline just picked Zenda up in her arms and started to carry her away.

So it was arranged, and the youngsters settled down to a perfect honeymoon of unalloyed bliss and sweet contentment. Every three months they would ride up to the Storm home and visit Kel and her folks, or Kel would ride down to the Vancefields and visit them, and between times they exchanged letters every week, and oh, what letters they did write! About seven months after Zen was married, in one of her letters to Kel, she added the following postscript:

"Oh! Kel dear, what do you think? Wingie has the cutest little colt that ever kicked holes in the atmosphere and the little rascal is just the *living image of Prince*, so we've named him Prince Fleetfoot II. And Wingie is just the proudest and happiest little mother that ever pulled grass for a living! And the little rascal comes right up to us and rubs his dainty little nose against Walden and me just like Prince used to do. I know you'll just want to squeeze him.
ZEN."

This was news indeed to Kel, but only provoked a broad smile from the Colonel.

The following fall they finally prevailed on Kel to take up the school for them and at least teach it until they could procure a teacher. She finally consented; and of course the pupils all loved her from the start and they made phenomenal progress under her tutelage.

About two years after Zen's marriage, she and Walden were sent to Montana to look after some valuable mining interests of the Vancefields that greatly needed a manager. The former manager had been killed in a mine accident, and the mine was going to ruin for the lack of a head to direct its affairs. Captain Vancefield declared that he was too old for such a strenuous undertaking, and urged Walden to go.

"What do you say, little sweetheart?" asked Walden of his wife.

"Why, I say let's go, dear. It will be quite a novel trip for us, and I'm sure the experience will be well worth having; besides, it is your father's wish and *our* duty."

"Brave little girl!" exclaimed the Captain, and he gathered

her to his old heart and squeezed her with the vim of a cinnamon bear.

So it was arranged for them to start at once—the sooner the better. They rode over *via* the Storms and made them a brief visit, and Kel and her father accompanied them to Springfield, where they got a train for the great Boundless West. They rested a day in Kansas City, a day in Omaha, and two days in St. Paul, and again two days in Butte, and then on to Helena, near which city the mine was located.

The West was a revelation to them—devoid of frills and camouflage, but an air of comradeship and easy good-nature greeted them everywhere. The people were all so friendly and broad-minded that the youngsters liked them; and soon they were comfortably domiciled in a little cabin all to themselves.

Walden found the mine indeed going to the dogs, but his skillful management soon changed matters, and in about a month it was paying big dividends again and rapidly rising in value.

When they arrived in Montana, they soon learned of the strange and mysterious robberies that were baffling everybody.

“Pshaw!” exclaimed Zen one evening when Walden returned from the mine and handed her a paper containing a vivid account of the latest exploits of the gentlemanly bandits. “If Kel were only here, she and I would go out and bring in these fresh guys;” and she sneered at the officers they had in that State.

“I really believe you two would turn the trick,” jokingly returned her husband.

About a month later the fleeing cashier was killed, and the subject was again revived, with added interest.

“Walden, I’m going to write to Kel and ask her to come out and visit us, and then we’ll show these tame cats what a couple of real bob-cats from the Ozarks can do;” and her teeth snapped like the jaws of a bob-cat as it jumps for a dog.

“That will be great, sweetheart mine; besides, we are both just dying to see a face from home.”

So it was settled, and Zen immediately wrote a long letter to Kel and sent her a number of clippings from the papers and fully acquainted her with the state of affairs in Montana.

Kel was delighted, for she was getting rusty for some new escapades; besides, Zen’s letters had fired her with a desire to see the wonderful country that produced so much of the gold of the world. She had really never been anywhere except to Nashville and the

Springfield fair, and her proud and venturesome spirit longed for new laurels. She carefully refrained from telling her parents about the bold highwaymen and why Zen wanted her to come. If the elder Storms had known of that, Kel felt sure she would never get away. She was just going to visit Zenda and would soon return—and perhaps bring Zen and Walden with her; so it was arranged, and the Colonel carried her to Springfield to take the train, and to return with her precious Prince Fleetfoot. Her father faithfully promised that the wonderful pony should have the best of care. It was like pulling cling-stone teeth for Kel to go away on a journey and not be riding Prince; and the little fellow seemed disconsolate at returning without his beloved mistress.

CHAPTER XXVI.

KEL'S TRIP TO THE WEST.

As Zen had told Kel just how to come and all about the route and the changes she would have to make, it was an easy matter for the Little Suff. to make the journey alone.

As she wished to avoid attracting attention to herself, when she arrived in Kansas City she procured some disguises and the necessary make-up materials, and with a few deft and skillful touches she converted herself into a quiet middle-aged woman, who would never win a prize at a beauty show. The rest of the way she made no mashes, and was left severely alone, like a house with a smallpox sign on the door.

She observed one rather vain and conceited young boob trying hard to butt-in with a pretty and modest little girl, who was traveling alone between Omaha and St. Paul. This amused Kel, and she decided to have a little fun with the coxcomb. After he had been repeatedly snubbed by the young lady, he returned to an empty seat just back of her and from which he could feast his shifty eyes on his prey. Kel got up and got a drink at the far end of the coach, and as she returned to her seat she quietly sat down in the seat with him and began:

"Ah! good evening, my friend. I see that you are lonesome, and as I am in the same boat, I thot that possibly we might find something interesting to talk about;" and Kel looked him steadily in the eyes.

He wavered and stammered and made a few disjointed replies to her questions, and then got up and remarked:

"Excuse me, madam, but my nerves feel the need of a smoke,

and I'm going up in the smoker to enjoy a pipe or two," and he was off like a shot.

"Very well, but we can resume our conversation when you return;" and Kel gave him a look that puzzled him greatly.

He must have enjoyed his pipe, for he did not return at all.

The little girl was astonished at the conduct of Kel and looked at her quizzically. Kel went over and slid in beside her and said in her sweetest tones:

"Don't be astonished, dear. I just wanted to get rid of that cad and save you from being bored and annoyed by his attentions;" and Kel turned her great pansy and lustrous eyes full on the girl's face and smiled.

That settled it. The girl capitulated at once and replied:

"Oh! I thank you, madam. He was annoying me dreadfully, and I disliked to call the conductor and make a scene;" and the poor little thing seemed so glad to find a friend at hand.

"I am Miss Edith Volney, of St. Joseph, Missouri, and I am on my way to St. Paul to visit Uncle Richard, mamma's oldest brother;" and she beamed on Kel with a look of gratitude that was pathetic.

"And I am Miss Storm, of Missouri, and I am pleased to know you, Miss Volney. I don't think your admirer will trouble you any more," continued Kel; and then they fell to, and were soon passing the time very pleasantly.

"You must be a teacher, Miss Storm," ventured the young lady after awhile, "for you seem so well posted on everything."

"Yes, I teach a little," admitted Kel.

Just before the train reached St. Paul, the boob came back to the coach, and Kel knew from the way he looked at the girl he meant to follow her. She acquainted Miss Volney with her suspicions, but cautioned her not to pay any attention to him and to act like she had never seen him before.

"Just leave him to me, dear, for I'm going to teach that bounder a lesson he won't soon forget," said Keldora.

"Are you going to call an officer and have him arrested?" anxiously inquired the girl.

"Oh, no!" replied Keldora; "it would hardly be worth while to waste the officer's time on such a snake. Just trust in me, dear, and you will see some fun before you get to your uncle's. I'm going with you all the way and see you safely there, so don't worry."

"It is awfully good of you, Miss Storm, to befriend me—an entire stranger;" and the girl looked her gratitude.

And sure enuff the sneaking cur was cautiously trailing them, but at a distance. After they reached the residence district and the houses were fewer and far apart, he increased his gait and was soon up with them. He strode right up and sang out:

"And this is the way you treat your *husband!*" and he reached out to clasp her arm.

The poor girl was sure terror-stricken, for she had never heard of such impudence. His hand had hardly touched her wrist when something happened. The quickness of its movements might cause it to be taken for a bob-cat in action. It was only our old friend Keldora again, but the Lord knows that was quite enuff. Kel made a jump for him and with lightning rapidity grabbed his wrist in her right hand and give it such a quick and powerful twist he keeled over and lighted on his head and groaned with pain. She had dislocated his wrist with her jiu-jitsu twist. He scrambled up on his feet, and the way he beat it would have made Dan Patch or Maud S. turn green with envy; and he may be going yet for all I know.

"He is a yellow one all right, dear," quietly remarked Kel as they resumed their way in the gathering darkness.

They soon arrived at Uncle Richard's, and Kel was presented and received a warm welcome from the bluff and hearty old gentleman; and when he heard the story from his niece's lips, he was speechless with amazement, and insisted that Kel come in and be their guest for the night, as she was not going on till late the next day. His wife seconded the invitation so ardently that Kel decided to accept their hospitality.

"But how in the world did you manage to do such a clever trick and at *your age?*" asked Mr. Burton.

Kel just laffed and laffed before she replied: "Perhaps, Mr. Burton, I'm not so aged as I appear to be;" and Kel laffed again.

"Well, of course, I can't always tell a woman's age like I can a horse's," said Mr. Burton, "but I should put you at about fifty-seven."

"Why, father!" remonstrated Mrs. Burton; "don't you know that it is very impolite to state a woman's age?"

"That's all right, Mrs. Burton," returned Keldora; "but we all err at times. I'm just twenty-one and getting younger every day." And then she laffed again as they all stared in bewilderment.

"You see, my friends," said Keldora, "I'll have to let you into a little secret. I'm just twenty-one and making a long journey alone, and in order to avoid being annoyed by such animals who consider themselves men, I have disguised myself until I look like all of fifty-seven, and it works like a charm. Why, I even sat down in the seat with that boob after he had annoyed your niece a long while, and tried to scrape up a conversation with him, and you ought to see the way he turned me down cold and lit out for the smoker."

"It was sure some fun, Uncle Richard," said Edith, "to see him slide out and get away when he thot he was being cornered by a middle-aged woman."

"Well, I'll be d——!"

"Father!" broke in his wife, just in time, "you must be careful of your language while he have such a clever guest."

"Well, mother, it certainly beats anything I ever heard of," continued Mr. Burton.

"It's certainly very clever, uncle," said Miss Volney, "and I hope Miss Storm will humor us all by removing her disguise and appearing as her proper self."

"Yes, indeed, miss, we must see you as yourself, for I know you're a wonderful girl anyway," said Mr. Burton.

"Very well, Edith; if you will show me to my room, I'll humor you all," replied Keldora.

Kel was shown to a neat little room and provided with everything in the way of toilet articles. In about five minutes she appeared among them all, and the old man just jumped in the air and exclaimed:

"*Sufferin' catfish!* Is it possible? Why, she isn't out of the teens yet, mother!" and he just simply gasped and collapsed.

After supper Kel seated herself at the piano and began to play and sing as only a master artist can, and then the old man exploded again:

"For Heaven's sake, miss! is there anything you can't do?"

"Oh! I presume so, but I might learn it," replied Keldora.

And then they all fell to and had a most enjoyable evening.

The old man was an old river man, but hearty and honest, and had seen a good deal of this world, but nothing like Keldora. They all fell in love with the Little Suff. and carried her to the stopo the next day and saw her off. She had resumed her disguise and it was a wonder to them all.

At Butte she decided to stop off and rest a day and see some-

thing of a real mining camp; and, owing to her disguise, she had no trouble at all.

After leaving Butte, she slipped into the lavatory and removed her disguise and appeared in her proper person.

Everyone was discussing the latest train and bank robberies and speculating on who the strange and fantastic outlaws might be. Kel listened carefully to all these tales and had also read the papers, which teemed with the accounts.

"I don't know what we'd all do if those dreadful bandits should hold us up," nervously moaned a big overgrown slob of a man, who only weighed about 275 pounds and looked strong enuff to whip his weight in wildcats.

"Oh! I subbose ve'd all throw up our hands and shell out like ve always do," facetiously replied a little Hebrew, who had most of the hall-marks of the East Side on him. He was just whistling, so to speak, to cover up his own nervousness, and Kel saw thru it at once.

"There are twenty-six men in this coach," quietly observed the Little Suff., "and surely you all wouldn't be yellow enuff to stick up your paws and surrender to one or two nervy boobs, would you?"

This shot got under several hides at once, as Kel intended it to, and the little Jew remarked:

"Berhaps ze young lady can catch ze bad mans!" and this got quite a laff at her expense, as he figured it would.

"Well, you brave lads just wait and see what 'ze young lady' can do," and she mimicked him so perfectly they all encored her. "I should like nothing better than to get a chance at these funny bandits;" and she gave them all such a look as they had never seen before.

"Whew!" whistled an elderly-looking gentleman near the center of the car, "but the child certainly has confidence in herself."

This also brot a laff at our shero's expense; but she wasn't caring about expenses just then.

"And self-confidence is an essential to success," quietly shot back our shero.

This truism could not be gainsaid; and they all dropped the outlaws for a while and set to discussing Keldora and wondering who she was. Her exquisite beauty and refined and cultured bearing bore testimony to her station in life, and they all forbore to taunt her any further.

The train was now within about thirty miles of Helena and just creeping along, as the snow was drifting over the tracks so fast it was not safe to run any faster; it was also about four hours late. The hour was about 11:40, and many of the passengers had yielded to the fatigue of the long and tedious ride and had dozed off into broken sleep.

All at once two masked men entered the front of the coach and sent a shot over the passengers' heads to frighten them and gain their attention simultaneously. Then the foremost bandit bowed and politely announced that they were collecting the income-tax, and hoped there were no slackers aboard. He carried a strong and capacious black sack, into which he invited the contributions to be dropped, and in his right hand he held a cocked .45 revolver that was devoid of all sentiment or camouflage. His companion was also well bred, and politely bowed and announced that it always grieved him very much to have to shoot anyone, so he hoped they would remember their manners and conduct themselves accordingly. "And if you have any artillery," politely explained the first speaker, "it will probably be best to forget that you have it; besides, if you tried to use your artillery in this dim light, you would be just as likely to hit each other as to punctuate us;" and he bowed again and smiled.

Every hand in that coach except Kel's was in the air and most of them trembling like an aspen leaf on which a spider was cake-walking. She immediately slid down between the seats and out of sight as soon as she caught a glimpse of the outlaws and waited till the opening ceremonies were over, as she wanted to hear all they had to say. Then "Bang!" boomed her six-shooter, and the first speaker went down and out with a well-aimed bullet thru his heart. The other one was plainly rattled, for he began to fire wildly and at random down the aisle, but only succeeded in wounding two of the passengers slightly. "Crack!" and again Kel's six-shooter made an announcement, and the other outlaw jumped in the air and yelled with pain and terror as he grabbed his helpless right hand, thru which Kel had very cleverly sent a bullet. In his embarrassment and terror he had dropped his other gun, and before he realized it she was in front of him and had her gun in his face and was telling him to be easy and not get rattled. Then, with the agility and quickness of melted lightning, she grabbed his left wrist and gave it a sudden jiu-jitsu twist that flopped the astonished gentleman over on his head and face, and he let out another howl of pain and terror

and begged to be spared, for he thot his time had surely come. Kel placed one tiny foot on his shoulders and held her ever-ready six-shooter at his head, and calmly directed the conductor and brakeman, who had just arrived from the smoker, to get a rope, so she could tie her guest in order to prevent him from jumping off and injuring himself. She soon had monsieur properly trussed up, and then she turned to the bewildered passengers and dryly remarked:

"This is about the yellowest crowd of boobs I ever saw," and her sarcasm was something withering.

Not a word from any of them. Then she turned to the old gentleman and mockingly asked:

"Daddy, what do you think of the *child's* self-confidence now?" and the way she put the emphasis on the word "child" put them all back in a normal condition again, and they all wanted to talk at once, and demanded to know who she was and where she hailed from.

"I'm just a little country schoolmam from old Missouri, and am known at home as 'The Suffrajet.' I was raised down in the Ozarks among the bob-cats and bears and moonshiners, and of course I learned to shoot a little as a pastime. I have saved you boobs from being cleaned out, and have done what the whole State has failed to do, and all because I have no yellow in me, but plenty of self-confidence." And she turned her glorious Ozark eyes full on the old gentleman again and mocked his tone and manner so perfectly that they all encored her.

Everybody wanted her picture, and the little Hebrew even offered five dollars for it.

"You poor little Jerusalem boob! I'm not selling my photos for a living;" and she gave him a look that put him down and out in a hurry.

After the wounded outlaw was securely tied and harmless, the conductor and brakeman wanted to take him up in the smoker and keep him under guard until they reached Helena, but Kel informed them that he was her prisoner and was going to remain right there where he was and that she would guard him herself, and she gave the trainmen such a look that they immediately bowed and acquiesced. She set to work and dressed his wounds and made him as comfortable as possible.

Everybody on the train wanted to crowd in and see the desperate man and the little girl who had so cleverly and bravely ef-

fectured his capture, but Kel ordered the conductor to lock the doors and keep them out, for she didn't care to be stared to death.

When the train pulled in Kel was met by Walden and Zen, and they were quickly informed of the capture, and accompanied her and the trainmen with the prisoner to the police station, where he was turned over to the authorities, and a brief account given of his capture and the killing of his pal by the little girl all alone and unaided, while the twenty-six *brave* men in the coach all vied with one another to see who could reach his hands up nearest to the roof of the car.

The thing was unheard of; and the news soon spread everywhere, and the papers had to use telegraph poles for type and exclamation points in writing it up and praising "the Little Suff. from Missouri," as she immediately became known.

The next day all the officials, including the Governor and his staff, called on her and tendered their thanks and insisted on honoring her in every way imaginable.

The rewards for the two men amounted to more than thirty thousand dollars, and this was turned over to Kel along with several gold medals for her bravery.

The Governor and the city together gave a big reception to Kel, and everybody who was anybody was there to see the shero and do her honor. The Governor led the grand march with Kel on his arm, and then came the Mayor with Zenda for his partner, and Walden had the Governor's wife for his partner. It was some affair all right, and passed into history as the greatest event of the State.

When it was learned that Zen was just as great a shot and daredevil as her mate, and it was she who was to blame for bringing Kel out there, she also became a shero, and shone with rare splendor.

When it was learned that the girls were rare musicians, they had to play and sing, and then the whole assemblage just simply went mad over them.

The Governor's son and half a dozen of the most prominent men of the State tried to propose to Kel, but she deftly side-stepped them all and just laffed at them.

As they had a shooting club near Helena, Kel and Zenda promised to attend the following week and show them how the girls of the Ozarks can shoot. This was the big event in the history of the club, and the girls easily defeated all their best shots; and when both girls gave the apple exhibition, like Kel demonstrated to Van Auber, they were all dumbfounded. And invitations came from

all over the Northwest for them to stop over let the people see them and give an exhibition of shooting. A theatrical manager in St. Paul wired an offer of three thousand dollars if they would give one entertainment of music and shooting in his house. They declined all such offers; and Kel turned the thirty thousand dollars reward money over to the city of Helena to found and endow a hospital.

On the night of the big ball and reception the wounded outlaw made his escape and was never heard of again. Kel did rub this piece of carelessness and incompetency in on the officials.

"Why, gentlemen, you're very lucky he didn't kidnap some of you," mocked the little devil in her finest vein of humor and sarcasm.

They wanted to elect her mayor of the town, but she only smiled.

Of course Kut soon got news of all these startling events and he was sure puzzled to know who she was and how to get out of his dilemma.

"I sure would not want her on my track," smiled Kut to himself. "She's worse than a whole flock of bob-cats and a few cyclones heaved in for good measure."

The officials insisted on making Kel a deputy sheriff and sending her out after the lone highwayman, and to this she agreed, but declined to be made a deputy.

"I'll round-up the polite cuss all right," she told them, and they applauded her to the skies.

It was the general belief, however, that the lone highwayman would now be afraid to resume his depredations. To this belief Keldora added a dissenting voice.

"The cuss is undoubtedly vain," she said, "and it would greatly gratify his vanity to pull off a bold *coup* right here under your snoot and then lay back and laff at you all."

And she was right, as usual. In less than ten days the stage that was bringing in ninety thousand dollars to meet the big pay-roll at the mines was held up and robbed in broad daylight and only about four miles out from Helena. The bandit was politer and more sarcastic than ever, and cleaned out the eleven passengers as well as capturing the pay-roll bag. When he was thru he forced three of the frightened men to securely strap his loot to his high-powered nag, and then he made them all get back in the stage and gave them a mock and sweeping bow, and exclaimed in correct Spanish:

"*Adios, señors y señoras.*" Then he turned and rode carelessly and leisurely away, as tho he were just out for a riding exercise and an air-bath.

Just as the stage started he called out in a taunting voice: "Tell the little *Wildcat* from Missouri to come and see me;" and he luffed at the humor of his taunt as he disappeared from view.

Within two hours the bold cuss was in Helena, drinking in the news of the bold hold-up and the taunting challenge that was sent to their honored guest. This roused the ire and slumbering manhood of the place as nothing else could have done, and the Governor and Mayor and Sheriff and other officials were in for organizing posses and combing the whole State and keeping it up till the robber was captured and his evil career ended.

"Gentlemen," said Keldora, "you would only be wasting your time, and would never succeed. As Señor Impudence has deemed me a foe worthy of his steel by sending me a polite challenge, I have accepted his invitation, and am going to pay the cuss a visit; so you will greatly oblige me if you will keep out of this little affair and let me settle it in my *own* way. I'll land him all right—just as I did the other two. In the meantime, if you all want to do something, you might send out a *tracer* after the one you let escape."

This last shot got their goats in a hurry, and they agreed to let the Little Suff. pull off the stunt in her own way.

It was now about 5 o'clock in the evening, and the next afternoon Kel was ready for the front-line trenches.

About a two-foot snow lay upon the ground, and that night another bad blizzard set in and just simply howled all night and was still at it the next day. About 2 o'clock that afternoon Kel had secured a fairly good mount, and, with her six-shooters, a Bowie-knife and a Winchester, she was ready for the fray. As the weather was so bad, her friends tried to persuade her to delay it until the storm had subsided.

"Nothing doing, gentlemen," said Keldora. "A little snow and storm only give zest to the chase. I feel certain the bandit is an ex-actor and an adept at disguising himself, and has a safe hiding-place near the city, where he conceals his loot and horse and can rest when necessary. I am also sure he is a mongrel Mexican, with Indian and Caucasian blood in his evil veins, not more than thirty years of age, a typical Bohemian, with considerable musical talent, and more or less romantic. My idea is, that if I ride out alone late in the day when no one is near, he will attempt to capture me and

carry me to his cave and make love to me in real stage style. He is a cheap sentimentalist, and would greatly enjoy such a romance; but I'll put a splinter in his romantic dreams and teach the poor simp a lesson. He has a considerable streak of yellow in his make-up, and his courage is only bravado. I'm calling the gentleman's hand, for my cards are all aces, except the *Joker* and a few visitors from the *Royal Family*."

This rare little speech brought forth the wildest applause and admiration.

Kel rode rapidly away toward the east and was soon swallowed up in the Montana blizzard. She had reached a point about six miles out when she saw a muffled figure coming up from the gulch to the left, and he evidently recognized her at once, for he sang out: "Hello, little Wildcat! I'm delighted to meet you."

She recognized him at once, and called out: "Throw up your hands, señor!"

"Like hell I will!" he returned, and at the same time let go a shot aimed at her right hand, but he was a little too slow about it.

"Crack!" went Kel's six-shooter, and a bullet went thru his left lung within an inch of his heart. He turned his horse and proceeded to escape, but he soon tumbled off in the snow, and his horse ran on alone.

His shot was a pretty good one, for it went thru Kel's horse's ear and thru her clothes between the arm and side of the body. It just grazed the skin of her right arm. His object was to cripple her so she couldn't shoot any more, and then capture her and carry her to his rendezvous, and have a bushel of fun taunting her while negotiating for her ransom.

The shot thru the horse's ear so frightened the poor animal that it became unmanageable and just ran and plunged wildly ahead, and her hands were so stiff with the cold she could not stop him nor turn him about and go back to the city. After running at top speed for about seven miles, he stumbled and fell in a gulch and threw Kel over his head, and she fell in such a way that it dislocated her left shoulder and twisted her neck so it rendered her unconscious. And thus she lay in the fast-falling and drifting snow for about an hour, when a miner with his pack-burro stumbled over her and dug her out of her white grave, and holding her on his burro, he soon reached his warm and comfortable cave, where his stowaway was carefully deposited on plenty of warm blankets and skins and given first aid. This "miner" was no other than our

old friend Kut. He had been to town, and had the late news about the girl starting out in such a storm and on such a hardy—or rather, foolhardy errand. He had made his purchases the day before, and early that morning had started for home before the storm got any worse. As he had seen Keldora on two previous occasions, he knew at a glance who his unconscious guest was.

Now here was another kink in Kut's tangled skein—would he ever be able to untangle his crossed wires and get out in the clear again? It seemed not. And yet "hope springs eternal," facetiously quoted Kut as he continued to administer to his guest's needs and make her comfortable. "Suppose she dies here in my den? Great snakes alive! but I would be in it for fair then," mused the young man to himself. "A killed man to my credit and a dead girl in my home and all this mazuma on my hands. Good-night, Kut, old boy!" and he shuddered at the grim possibilities. "With such a chain of evidence against me, who would ever believe anything I might say?" and he saw his finish at the end of a rope.

He bent over the soft and unconscious form of the girl, and a great wave of pity swept over his storm-tossed and rugged soul, and he could not keep back the tears. Memory brought back his little Canary, and he could not fail to note how very much alike the two were in looks, size, etc. His great storm-stressed soul went out to this poor girl, and he swore to stand by her and see her thru—even if it did place his neck in the noose.

She slept on and scarcely ever moved. He had her slightly frozen hand and arm that were protruding above the snow when he found her thawed out and in nearly a normal condition, but still she refused to come back to life. She just seemed to sleep—and sleep.

On first examining her, he found her left shoulder dislocated and the vertebræ of the neck badly twisted, but he promptly reduced these lesions and had straightened everything out and placed it in its normal place—but still she would not come back.

She had one six-shooter in her left belt and her Bowie-knife still with her, but her other gun and rifle had been lost in the wild ride.

Kut realized that her horse had thrown her in some way; and he searched her over for a possible bullet-wound, and found the scratch on her right arm and the hole thru her clothes. He knew from this evidence that she had met up with the outlaw, and he

was willing to bet heavily that the cuss was in a worse condition than she was.

The storm was still increasing in fury and getting very cold—about fifteen degrees below zero and by morning it might be forty degrees below.

“Well, I have plenty of grub and things for several weeks,” he mused to himself, “and if she decides to wake up and will condescend to stay and accept my hospitality, I think I can entertain her for awhile—till this cussed storm abates a little. Neither man nor beast could weather it long outside now. Whatever possessed such a delicate little flower to brave such a storm?—and only in pursuit of a worthless outlaw. I hope she got him all right. But how did she ever happen to be dumped in the snow? The cold is evidently not keeping her in a comatose condition. It’s got my goat and I give it up.”

The awful storm raged for two days more, and neither man nor beast dared to venture out. “What has become of the Little Suff.?” was on every tongue; and a feeling of gloom and sorrow seemed to settle down over the place like a shroud. Everyone believed that she had lost her way and perished in the blizzard.

Zenda and Walden were inconsolable. “Should they send a wire to her parents?” “Not yet,” whispered something in Zenda’s soul. “We must wait and find her body first. Oh! why did we let her go?” wailed the poor distracted girl.

“There seemed no way of stopping her, dear,” quietly returned Walden.

“Right you are, dear husband, for when Kel makes up her mind to do a thing there is no way to stop her,” sighed his wife in deepest sorrow.

After the storm abated, searching parties were organized and sent out to find her body. All they found was the dead body of the outlaw frozen so stiff it would make a run on the fires of hell to thaw him out. He was found to be disguised as a prospector, and had a little more than four hundred dollars in his belt, two .45s, an ugly stiletto of Spanish make, and a Winchester. He appeared to be about thirty years of age and a mongrel, about like Kel had guessed. His horse had reached town that night and as it was alone, the people guessed that Kel had either winged him or had been captured by him.

Keldora’s horse was found a little later with a broken fore leg and frozen stiff in a deep gully near the trail. The bullet-hole thru

its ear told the people plainly that the bandit had got in one wide shot before he was killed, and that ear-wound was probably what frightened the animal and caused it to run away. "But what has become of the girl?" That was the question on every lip. She had killed the bandit and his horse had returned unhurt, and her nag had been found dead with a bullet-hole thru its ear. "Did that same shot also kill the girl? If so, *where* was she?" If she was still alive after the horse had fallen and broken its leg, she couldn't have gone far in such a storm, they reasoned. It was puzzling and exasperating to the last degree. Perhaps *Time*, the great revealer of secrets, would loosen up and tell—yes, perhaps!

It was about 5 o'clock in the evening when Kut arrived at his den with his unconscious guest, and at a few minutes past 11 o'clock that night, while he was rubbing her hands and arms trying to keep the blood circulating and thus relieving the heart and vital organs from any tendency to congestion, her great liquid and dreamy orbs suddenly snapped open and gazed in wonder into his own startled eyes.

"Speak! Speak, please, and say you're better!" exclaimed the astonished man.

She just continued to stare at him, and then her face cleared up a little and she softly smiled at him. Then her lids drooped again, and those glorious soul-windows were again curtained in darkness. Then she began to breathe softly, and after a few minutes turned over and sighed.

"Oh, I'm so glad you live!" exclaimed Kut. "Can I do anything for you, Miss Storm?"

She just lay silent for a few minutes and then turned over again and faced him as her great bottomless eyes opened again and she turned them full on Kut's face and continued to stare at him. He began to show signs of uneasiness, for he began to think that her brain had been injured in the fall and her mind wasn't quite right.

"Please speak, miss, and let me know that you are all right," pleaded the frightened man.

"Mr. Bandit, what difference would it make to you anyway whether I'm right or wrong in the head—whether I live or die?" and her great somber eyes had a gleam in them that sizzled like a tiger's eyes at bay.

"Oh, Miss Storm! you're mistaken. I'm not a *bandit*. It was I who found you back there in the snow almost frozen stiff and entirely unconscious, and I brought you here to my crude home,

and have worked with you ever since to revive you," said Kut.

"When did you bring me here, and what is the time now?" asked Keldora.

"It was about 5 o'clock in the evening, and now it is 12:20 midnight," replied the young man, courteously. "Were you out after the lone highwayman?"

"Yes, and I think I got him," replied Keldora. "But who are you, and where am I?"

"My name is Kutly Badd, and you are in my cave-home, about twenty miles southeast of Helena," smiled Kut, with a ring of honesty in his voice.

"If I have wronged you in thinking that you are the bandit whom I pursued and with whom I exchanged shots last evening when we met, I humbly beg your pardon, Mr. Badd," replied Keldora contritely.

"You were certainly wrong, Miss Storm, and it is a pleasure to forgive you," said Kut. "Are you resting easily now?"

"Oh, yes! and I think I'll soon be all right again," replied Keldora.

"I'm awfully glad to hear that," continued Kut. "Can I get you anything or do aught to please you?"

"If you will be so kind, I should like a drink of water, and then please tell me something about yourself;" and again those great Andean eyes, with the moonlight of the Orinoco River playing tag in their cosmic depths, were turned quietly on him and surveyed him from head to foot.

"You are dressed like a miner, but I don't believe you are one—in reality," went on Kel in her critical way; "and you must be a musician, from the look of those instruments," and her eyes took in his banjo and guitar—also his many books, not cheap novels, either; "and I observe that you use correct speech and are a student," went on the girl.

"Well, yes, miss, I play a little to amuse myself and also try to beguile the lonely hours with books, and I have just a smattering of education," explained Kut modestly.

"But why are you masquerading as a miner and living in an isolated cave by yourself?" persisted the Little Suff.

"That's quite a weird story, miss, and I'm afraid you might not be interested in it after hearing it; besides, it brings back memories that are painful and which I want to forget;" and he hung his head and sobbed audibly.

"I'm sorry to have probed an old wound in your past, Mr. Badd, and if you prefer not to tell me your story, I'll just bury my woman's curiosity and let it go at that; but can you assure me on your word of honor that you are not an outlaw and criminal?" persisted Kel relentlessly, and her eyes pinned him to the mat.

"Yes, I can so assure you, miss; and while I recently killed a coyote in the human form, I do not consider myself a criminal;" and his eyes had a cold and steely look that never quavered.

"Then I'll give you my hand, and we'll be *tillicums** at least, for I realize that you saved my life; and no matter what your reasons were for taking a human life, you have my sympathy and good-will," said Keldora.

"Oh, I thank you for those sweet words, Miss Storm, and just know you will exonerate me when you know my story; and I don't blame you for the two coyotes you snuffed out," went on Kut. "I did not shoot my enemy from ambush, but grasped the cur by the throat and cut his black heart in twain; and he was heavily armed at the time and had an equal chance to kill me;" and Kut's steel-dark eyes again emitted sparks of hatred.

"As soon as the storm subsides so it is safe to go out, I'll give you safe conduct back to your friends, but it may be several days yet. It is fully 20 degrees below zero now and will be about 40 below by morning, and the snow is falling and drifting fast, so you can see how much of a chance you'd have getting thru it. I have four rooms here and plenty of blankets and grub and books, if you care to read, and if you prefer to be alone, I'll keep out of sight," carefully explained Kut. "If you want anything to eat, I shall only be too glad to cook for you and to administer to your wants in every possible way;" and he looked at her wonderful face all wreathed in smiles, as she kept those magnetic eyes fastened on his ruff but manly face, that showed strength and kindness in every rugged line.

"Oh! I should much rather just lie here and talk to you—for awhile yet; and I'm not a bit hungry—for food, thank you," said Keldora.

"Very well; and as I am not sleepy, we can talk till you want to sleep," Kut replied.

"Mr. Badd, won't you favor your *guest* with some music?" and those Ozark eyes were made to be obeyed.

**Tillicums*—An Indian word meaning "friends."

"Certainly, Miss Storm, if you can stand it;" and he took down his guitar with all the tenderness of a young mother handling her first-born. He quickly tuned it up, and then he softly played some of the old plantation melodies with a great deal of feeling and expression.

"Splendid! You're a real musician, Mr. Badd. I just know you can sing;" and again her eyes had their way, and Kut sang in a clear and musical voice several old songs, and then he branched off and played and sang one of his own compositions. This brought out more praise and a look of happiness on her radiant face.

"What is the name of that last song?" asked Keldora.

"Oh! that is one I composed myself, and I call it 'TRYING TO FORGET,'" replied Kut.

"It's beautiful—I love it—won't you play it again for me?" begged Keldora.

"To be sure—all night, if you wish me to;" and Kut's eyes had a merry twinkle in them.

Then he played and sang it again with a depth of feeling one seldom hears, for he was trying to play the soreness out of his heart—endeavoring to erase the wounds from his soul. Kel was simply delighted, and gazed at him in wonder and bewilderment.

"Where did you learn to play and sing, Mr. Badd?" Keldora asked.

"Never learned it—just born in me, I guess," replied Kut.

"Weren't you born and raised in the South?" queried Keldora.

"Yes, miss; over in the wildest part of eastern Kentucky," answered Kut.

"Ah! I thot so. Then you are no stranger to bob-cats and moonshiners," and she laffed with him over the question.

"I was born in the Ozarks of southern Missouri, and I also know something about the critters," said Keldora; then they both laffed again and clasped hands as a further token of their friendship and kinship.

"I'm just awfully sorry I mistook you for that bandit, Mr. Badd," continued Keldora; and they laffed another duet.

"It was perfectly natural, I admit; and now won't you tell me about the little episode?" coaxed Kut in his happiest mood.

Keldora soon acquainted him with the affair and the history leading up to it.

"Wonderful girl! To start out alone and in such a storm after a desperado! You're certainly living up to your name, Miss Storm;

and I thank my stars that you are not after *me*," smiled the young man dryly.

"Don't be too sure about that, Mr. Badd, for I also have a commission to find the man who killed the *cashier* and bring him in—so the people may decorate him with a medal;" and she smiled archly at him and kept her great searching eyes riveted on his face. He did not start, but the color came to his face so plainly she felt sure of her shot.

"I plead guilty to killing that snake, Miss Storm, and I also saved the bank's money he had in charge—about four hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and I have it all safely here in my retreat and have been trying to think of some way of returning it without getting myself in bad," explained Kut.

"Great!" exclaimed Keldora. "Now you must tell me the whole story—why you killed the cashier, and why you are hiding here in this cave and masquerading as a miner, etc."

"That will probably be best, Miss Storm; but as it is quite late and the curfew has chimed long ago, I think it will be best to postpone it till to-morrow—with your permission;" and he blushed like an awkward school-boy confessing his sins to a good-looking young schoolmam.

"Perhaps it will. But let's have a little more music before we retire, and if you will bring me the banjo, I'll try to help you;" and poor Kel could not storm a faint blush away from her pretty face.

Kut brot the instruments, and soon they were playing like professionals on a vaudeville circuit; and oh, how they could play! and how perfectly their wonderful voices trailed together in divine harmony! It was hard to tell which was the more surprised—he or she.

Kut put on more logs and built up a big fire, and told her if she wanted anything during the night, to call him. "And do not be afraid," said Kut, "for no one can get in here nor even find my retreat. Good-night and pleasant dreams, Miss Storm."

"The same to you, mine good host, and may all our troubles end with the raging storm," responded Keldora.

CHAPTER XXVII.

KUT'S CONFESSION AND THE NEW COOK.

They both had flower-scented dreams that night—only Kut did most of his dreaming with wide-open eyes and trying to unravel the mystery and planning how to "get out in the clear again,"

as the railroad boys used to say when they were in trouble and the dispatcher wouldn't clear them.

Kel had a sound and refreshing sleep, and was too happy to do much dreaming—except in soft and dim colors, like echoes from the Vast and Far Away. She awoke with a new and strange sense of happiness rioting in her soul—and not a particle of fear in her heart. Most girls would have been scared half to death if placed in her position. Kel wasn't made of fear materials.

As she hadn't undressed herself, it didn't take her long to dress. She had just snuggled down under the thick warm blankets and slept like a tired child.

Kut was already astir, and as soon as Keldora's great dream-like eyes snapped open, she smelled the delicious odor of frying bacon and eggs and coffee; and those odors were real perfume, too, for now, after her terrible strain of the day before, and no supper the night before, she had an appetite—or at least a mighty good imitation of one. The whole place was as warm and comfortable as any steam-heated house, and she timidly slipped out where Kut was doing the cooking, and called out in pleasant tones:

"Good morning, Mr. Badd. Did you have pleasant dreams?" and she rewarded him with a shot from her eye-arsenal that caused him to surrender at once.

"*Buenos dias, señorita.* My dreams were rainbows going to their first circus, and couldn't be brighter. I hope you slept well and didn't dream of *bandits* and burglars?" And they both laughed a duet that was soul-refreshing. The way he emphasized the word "bandits" made her hang her pretty head and blush.

"Do you need a second cook? I can boil water without burning it and can fry ice cream in a fireless cooker," bantered Kel in her happiest mood.

"If you have a good character from the last place where you cooked, I'll give you a trial," mocked Kut in return badinage. "You might set the table—that barrel over there standing on its head; and then if you will watch this coffee and see that it doesn't boil over, I'll get out my real silver and plate and open some peaches and crack some nuts, for I also have a near appetite this beautiful, spring-like morning. I was up to take a look-out a while ago, and my lazy old thermometer only registered 38 degrees below, and I don't think the snow is a bit more than twenty feet deep; but as it shows no tendency to let up, we may have some real winter weather by to-morrow."

Kel was astounded at his wit and humor and keen irony—why, he was almost equal to her beloved Zen. “Why, he’s a real charming man and a conversationalist and *bon vivant* of the highest order,” blushed Kel to herself; “and just to think that I first thot him a horrid old bandit!” and she made a sly face at herself. Then she spoke to him in Spanish and was delighted to find that he was at home in that tongue.

Kut had made two ruff chairs out of saplings, and soon they were enjoying a real breakfast of bacon and eggs, crackers, cheese, olives, peaches and cream, butter, and real sure-enuff coffee. Kut had plenty of means and believed in good living, so his place was bountifully stocked with all the good things on the market. He also had plenty of honey, jellies, candy, sardines and canned fish, etc. They both enjoyed their first breakfast to the full and spent more than an hour at it, and then they cleaned up the dishes and had a couple of hours of music.

They melted snow and had the purest and softest water to drink—and didn’t care much if the storm never ended. Kut had plenty of lemons and oranges, and they made lemonade with orange juice in it—“and this nectar will be our moonshine,” solemnly announced the boy as he made the drink and brot Kel a big glass of the sparkling thirst-quencher. Then Kel seated herself on the table and assumed a stern and solemn air as she announced:

“The court is now in session, and the first case on the docket is Mr. Kutly Deep Badd, charged with taking human life (*and he not an M. D.*) and having four hundred and fifty thousand dollars of the bank’s money in his possession. Mr. Badd, are you guilty or not guilty?”

“May it please the court, I am not guilty. I only killed a coyote and snake that was masquerading in human form;” and Kut tried to keep back his humor, that just would bubble to the surface.

“The prisoner must tell the whole story, and then the court can decide;” and she gave him a look that sent his blood rioting thru his whole system. “It is my duty to warn the prisoner that anything he says may be used against him, and that I *may* give him a *life* sentence;” and Kut’s blood rioted and mutinied some more.

“All right, your honor,” said Kut; “I think I should like a *lifer*.”

And then Keldora’s blood insisted on joining the I. W. W. and Bolsheviki.

"May it please the court," continued Kut, "I shall have to go back to the dear old hills of my native heath and begin at the beginning."

Then he vividly and with dramatic fervor and eloquence related his whole sad story, with the single exception of his train job in Minnesota and his bank episode in South Dakota. He didn't deem it necessary to make her unhappy with these two mistakes, which he now regretted deeply. At the time, and while under the control of the demon Vengeance, he felt justified in doing these two jobs. He had to have the means to follow Brinkley, and there seemed no other way, and if he hadn't had the means to follow the scoundrel, the four hundred and fifty thousand dollars he recovered from the rascal would have been lost to the Montana bank—so, all in all, he wasn't such a bad one as some would claim. Put yourself in his place, you saints who would condemn him, and try to look at it from his viewpoint.

Before Kut had finished Kel's eyes were looking like an Arkansas roof and her whole heart went out to him in all the wild and deep glory of its virgin and deathless love.

"My poor boy!" said Kel, "you are not guilty. You're a MAN—a *real* man, and I'm proud to claim you as a *tillicum*."

Then she dropped her eyes as he clasped her hands and said:

"I want the *life* sentence—just with *you*, dear heart, for I love you, and would rather die than to try and live without you for my soul-mate."

"Very well, Kut dear," said Kel, "it shall be a lifer, and I shall guard you closely and not give you a chance to escape."

Then the strong man gathered the frail little girl in his great arms of iron and steel and almost squeezed her to death.

"My own precious little Kel—my sweetheart wife-to-be," continued Kut, "you've made me the happiest man in all the great world of man's ugliness and Nature's beauty. Let it storm—who cares?" And their lips met and clung in that Vast Forever soul-kiss that keeps the rainbow forever in our skies. It is the kiss that puts the color and fragrance in all the flowers and plants dream-seeds in every life.

"Isn't it perfectly wonderful, dear heart, that when I started out after a *bandit* I should find *my husband*?" asked Kel.

"It certainly is, little sweetheart mine," replied Kut; "and now that our paths run in the same direction, whither shall we go?"

"Straight back to the dear old Ozarks," said Kel, "where we can love and live and dream in peace."

The next three days that they spent in the cave on account of the awful storm were the sweetest days in all their lives and will ever have a perfumed place in Memory's old flower-tangled orchard.

They would return to Helena as soon as possible, restore the money to the bank, and tell their story to the officers, and if they wanted to hold Kut and try him for killing Brinkley, well and good.

"But, sweetheart," said Keldora, "I'll be at your side and no prison bars can ever separate us;" and she clung to him like a mother to her babe that is about to be taken away from her and put in a "*home*."

"Brave and loyal little woman!" exclaimed Kut. "I can brave anything or face any fate with such a pal!" And again those kisses that keep the stars eternally in the skies.

Together they cooked and played and sang and dreamed while the storm raged on—and days were only measly little fleeting seconds *now*.

The time finally came for their departure; and, with the money and Keldora on the burro, Kut led the way back to Helena, and went first to Walden's home and acquainted them with their wonderful experiences.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

KUT'S ACQUITTAL AND MARRIAGE.

It was late in the evening when Zen heard a knock at their door, and when Walden opened the door he fairly staggered as he exclaimed: "Great heavens! Come right in. Where have you been all this time?" and he forgot all about everything except his joy at seeing Kel alive and well.

Zenda was only a few paces behind Walden, and it took both men a long, long while to pry the two girls apart and wipe away their tears of joy at being reunited.

Then Kel tried hard to keep back her blushes as she presented Kut to them as one of the greatest heroes of all time—"and *my* affianced husband," meekly admitted the Little Suff., with a shy and happy look at the big stalwart six feet and four inches of a man who tried vainly to outblush Kel—and almost succeeded.

"Well, of all the surprises this is the limit!" exclaimed Zen; and she held her little pal off at arms' length and continued to stare at her in astonishment. "And to think that you never even con-

sulted *me* about such an important matter!" mocked Zenda in her fine ironical way.

"Well, dear, you see we were so situated at the time it was impossible to consult anyone but ourselves," explained Kel; "besides, we're just perfectly adapted in every way, and he has solemnly promised to always *obey* me;" and she turned those glorious all-summer and vast-forever eyes up at Kut, and he promptly threw both hands up in the air in token of unconditional surrender.

Then the four of them sat down and just laffed an old-fashioned quartet till they couldn't laff another smile.

Zenda and Kel soon had a real meal smoking hot on the pretty table, and the way the prodigals fell to and ate was a sufficient testimonial to their appetites.

Then Kut dramatically recited his life-story, and how he followed and killed Brinkley, and dug the Little Suff. out of the snow and thawed her out and back to life in his cave.

"Wonderful! Splendid!" echoed Walden and Zen in the same breath.

"Mr. Badd, I am proud to give you my hand and call you friend and *brother*," said Walden, with a dry wink at Kel.

"And I'm just simply delighted to have another big brother—and oh! such a *big* one, too," smiled Zen as she gave him her dainty little hand and a squeeze that went clear thru his heart and clinched itself on the other side of his soul.

"Welcome to our home, brother Kut, for henceforth you are one of the family;" and Walden gave the big fellow another hand-grasp and a friendly slap on the back that caused the giant to blush like a frightened school-boy.

"You even dare to think of going to a hotel and we'll shoot you for a slacker," mocked Zen. "Won't we, dear Kel?"

"We'd do a little worse than that," said Kel; "we'd paint him yellow and bury him in the sage-brush, where the coyotes prowl and notch the horizon."

And Kel slipped her pretty little soft hand in Kut's big brawny one and took a shot at his soul with her glorious soul-lit eyes; and he meekly promised to obey them *both*, "for I can see right now that I have *two* bosses;" and the big and happy rascal made a mock and ironical bow that almost rivaled Zen's irony.

"Zen, dear," said Kel, "do you know that he is about as ironical as you are? and that is paying him a very high compliment."

"I can see that much already," dryly admitted Kut.

"And he is also a real musician, Zen, and our voices just slip along together as tho they were made especially for each other;" and Kel gave her big boy a look of pride and a smile he could dream in forever.

"How fortunate!" exclaimed Walden. "We can now have a real quartet."

Then they all got their instruments and talked about music—say, they just had a riot of music, and it was past midnight when they retired for the night.

The next morning they had a splendid breakfast of all the good things the market afforded, and then Walden sent word to the mine that he would not be there that day, and asked the foreman, Tom Kelley, to run things or just let things run themselves. Then they got ready, and about 10 o'clock started for the bank.

They asked to have a private interview with the president and a few of the directors of the bank. Their request was promptly granted, and they were soon closeted with the president, the new cashier and three of the directors, in the directors' room. They were all so delighted at seeing the Little Suff. alive and among them again that it was hard to divert it from being a social affair and get down to business.

Kel arose, and at a signal Kut and Walden brought forward the two big suit-cases and soon had the four hundred and fifty thousand dollars on the table—to the astonishment of the officials.

"Gentlemen," said Keldora, "I have the honor and the pleasure to restore the money your institution lost thru the rascality of your late cashier."

Then she quickly related the circumstances of her hunt for the bandit, their exchange of shots, and Kut finding her frozen in the snow and rapidly slipping away into that Voiceless Night which has no morning at the other end of it.

Then Kut rose to his full height and, with a determined look on his rugged features, related his own sad story and how he had been an avenging Nemesis on Brinkley's trail.

"I had been planning for days how to return the money," said Kut, "but could not see just how I could do it without getting myself into trouble. Then I stumbled on Miss Storm, and after she guessed that I had killed Brinkley, we soon agreed on our course of action; so here I am—the restorer of your money, and ready to stand trial for ridding the world of Brinkley."

"You did a splendid job, Mr. Badd, and I congratulate you," said the president of the bank.

Then they all shook hands with Kut and only had kind words for him and his heroic deed.

"The reward for returning the money to us is thirty thousand dollars," announced the president, "but I'm a little puzzled as to whom to pay the reward;" and he looked from Kut to Kel and back again.

"Oh! it will all be in the family," remarked Zen in her ironical and humorous way.

Then they all smiled good-naturedly, and the cashier suggested that each one be given half of it.

"No, it all really belongs to Miss Storm. Ridding the world of that dangerous coyote is all the reward I desire," declared Kut positively.

That settled it, and the thirty thousand dollars was turned over to Kel.

"Now we are going over and call on the prosecuting attorney and county judge and the other officials and make a clear breast of the whole affair," quietly announced Kut as he arose.

"And we should like to have you gentlemen present as witnesses," announced Kel.

"Certainly, Miss Storm," said the president of the bank; "we shall only be too glad to attend and render you folks any assistance in our power."

The story soon leaked out, and soon the court-room was packed to the roof with citizens of Helena—all anxious to get a peep at the wonderful actors in this remarkable drama.

The president first arose and stated that Miss Storm and Mr. Badd had returned the entire four hundred and fifty thousand dollars to the bank, and that the bank had paid the reward money to Miss Storm, as Mr. Badd modestly refused to touch a penny of it.

Then Kut rose to his full height and, with his big head and broad shoulders thrown back in the air, dramatically recited the story of his wrongs and how he had given up all else to follow and avenge his wife's tragic death and his own wrongs.

"Now, gentlemen, I'm in your hands," said Kut, "and am ready to be arrested and tried for killing that beast." Then he sat down, amidst such an uproar of applause as the place had never heard before.

There was not a dry eye in the place. Even the prosecuting

attorney discovered that he had tears to shed and he didn't care a damn who saw him shed them, either. Then he quietly arose and held up his hands as a token for silence.

"Arrest and try you?" he said looking Kut over and over with pride and admiration in his hardened old eyes. "Hell, man! the laws of Montana do not consider it a crime to kill coyotes and rattlesnakes. You're free; and I want to shake your hand and personally thank you," and his hand clasped Kut's in a true Western grip.

Then the Judge signaled for silence, and the Governor rose and personally thanked Kut and Kel for the splendid and heroic work they had done for humanity and the State of Montana. Then he and his staff and the Mayor and all the county and city officials vied with one another in shaking hands with Kut and Kel, and everyone wanted to entertain them at the same time.

Then Kel arose and held up her pretty hand, and you could have heard a pin drop, so profound was the silence.

"I think I have made good in rounding up Señor Bandit and saving the bank from ruin," said Kel. "The only part of it that I regret is having to kill the greaser. I had counted on capturing the polite cuss alive, but I saw at once he intended to cripple me so I couldn't fight and then carry me off to his cave and taunt me while he negotiated for my ransom. As soon as I divined his intentions, I gave the conceited cuss a lesson in drawing and shooting quickly. But you are now rid of all three of them, and I have also captured a life-partner;" and she could not keep back the blushes as the assembled crowd went wild with shouts and praises.

"Judge," continued Kel, "would you mind splicing Mr. Badd and me before we adjourn *sine die*?"

"Delighted!" assented his honor.

Then the prosecutor piloted them across the hall and helped them to procure a license, when they returned and were quickly united in marriage amidst the breathless silence of the spectators.

Such a wild and happy scene was never before witnessed, and the congratulations were long and ardent.

The Governor and the Mayor invited them to a reception in their honor, as both the State and the city wished to show their appreciation. They accepted the invitation, and two days later a social event was pulled off in Helena that was indeed unique and spectacular.

Walden and Zen stood up with them when they were married and the Judge said in conclusion:

"Bless you, my children. May you always be as happy as I am in uniting you to-day."

CHAPTER XXIX.

KUT AND KEL GO HUNTING—ONIONS.

The next day after the marriage, the Mayor and other officials called on Kut and Kel and announced that the total rewards for the capture (*dead or alive*) of the lone bandit amounted to just twenty-five thousand dollars, and they wished to pay the money to Kel, which they did, and congratulated her again on her wonderful bravery and abilities. They also informed her that the ninety thousand dollars the lone outlaw had stolen from the stage on his last hold-up had not yet been found, and the Mine Company had authorized them to offer a reward of twenty thousand dollars for the recovery of the lost ninety thousand dollars.

"Would the Little Suff. undertake to find the dead bandit's cache?" asked the Mayor.

"Why, to be sure I will—just to keep in exercise and make my work out here complete," replied Keldora.

"Splendid!" exclaimed the Mayor and his brother officers "We feel sure now that the money will be found and restored to the rightful owners."

"And as I have nothing on hand now except to just be happy, I'll go along and help my wife in the hunt;" and Kut blushed like a bashful girl at her first dance.

"Of course you'll go along—that's what I got you for—to stay right at my side all thru life;" and she gave Kut a look that has ever conquered the strongest men all down thru the misty and cobwebby Past.

"It is nice to have such a good boss," and Kut smiled at the Mayor.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Badd," said the Mayor. "You are the luckiest man in the world."

"Very well, then," said Kut; "after the reception, we will go out and find that dough or perish in the snow."

They all laughed heartily, and the committee then took their departure.

The reception took place two days later, and was the most brilliant social affair ever held in Montana, and everyone vied with

his nabor to do the city and State's guests honor; and the wedding presents were many and costly.

Kel had to make a speech and she did herself proud, too. That piece of dramatic eloquence carved her name all over the stars and far-flung planets.

Every inducement was offered the pair to remain in Montana and grow up with the State.

"Your husband can easily be our next governor, if you will only remain with us," enthusiastically exclaimed the Governor to Kel as the pair led the grand march at the closing ball.

"And we're already laying the wires to elect Mr. Vancefield our next mayor," went on the chief executive in an attempt to induce the Little Suff. and her distinguished husband to remain and be one with them.

"Very flattering, Governor, I assure you all, but I have a better job for my husband;" and the little witch gave him a look that almost floored him.

"Indeed! and may I inquire what it is?" asked the Governor

"Certainly," replied Keldora; "it is to go back to our dear old native hills of the friendly Ozarks and help me be happy—just to live—and love—and dream—far away from all the worry and strife and intrigue of public life. We have the most beautiful place in all the world—and I can even now hear the birds and the brooks. and trees and the dear old hills calling me—and we're going; besides, I promised daddy and mamma that if I ever married I'd bring my husband home and live there, where we could comfort them in their evening of life, just as they comforted me in the morning of life; and, Governor, I have the most wonderful parents in all the world, and to desert them in their old days and go off and live with strangers—never!" and her wonderful eyes popped and blazed like old Vesuvius starting to work after a few years of inaction.

"Wonderful little woman!" was all his excellency could find to utter.

The next day after the big reception and ball in their honor, Kut and Kel mounted their horses and started out on the search for the bandit's cache. The weather had cleared off and was fine—just cold enuff to be bracing, but not disagreeable.

"Dear husband," said Kel, "I think we had better go over to the place where I met the cuss and see if we can pick up a clew in that vicinity."

"Right you are, little sweetheart mine," replied Kut. "Lead on, as you know the way."

After about an hour's ride, they came to the place where the bandit first appeared and called out that fatal and taunting challenge to the "Little Wildcat," as he facetiously called her.

"Right over there, dear Kut, is where he emerged from that deep gulch," said Kel, "and it is my guess his cave is not far away."

"We'll soon test your diagnosis, dear Kel," replied Kut, "so here goes for the gulch and the still hunt; and the twenty thousand dollars reward will pay us for our time and labor."

"To be sure it will," continued Kel, "but the satisfaction of completing the job is my real incentive. I should hate to go home and leave the work unfinished—it would always be a black mark on my card, and I don't intend that my record shall ever be so disgraced!" and her eyes flashed like primeval lightning.

"No wonder I'm proud of my wonderful little wife with the big soul," and Kut reached over and gave her a kiss and a hug that would have made a grizzly bear jealous.

"And I'm just as proud of my big husband, too," and she returned the caresses and added an illegal rate of interest.

"And oh, won't daddy and mamma be proud of their new big boy!" exclaimed Kel as she looked him over from keel to mizzenmast, and with that soul-devouring look in her glorious eyes.

"Perhaps they'll not be so blind as you are, dear, and will be able to see me as I am," modestly protested Kut.

"They'd better not be blind," was Kel's smiling rejoinder.

Then the search began in earnest and continued up and down the gulch and its nabors till about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, when Kel all at once exclaimed:

"Come over here, dear; I smell *onions*."

"Onions!" bellowed Kut. "For heaven's sake, how could onions be out here in this desolate and snow-clad wilderness?" and he looked incredulous.

"Of course, they don't *grow* out here; but certain outlaws, and especially those of Mexican lineage, are very fond of Yiddish weeds and he had probably cooked some of them for his last dinner that day, and their odor lives a long time; so, my dear husband, I feel sure we're near the end of our search;" and she gave him a look of self-confidence that made him fairly jump with pride and delight.

"Thou wonderful blood-hound!" and Kut gathered her to his

heart and kissed and caressed her again and again. Then they both sniffed the air and slowly proceeded to follow the scent of the Spanish Rose.

In about ten minutes the odor seemed to be coming out right thru a big boulder, but, of course, that was impossible. Kut, with his Herculean strength, soon found that the boulder was a snugly-fitting door to a cave, and in a few minutes they both entered the cave and closed the stone door after them.

"Do you reckon we'll find anyone here?" tentatively asked Kut of his wife.

"I think not, dear. I'm quite sure the cuss operated alone." And she was right, as usual.

They found two big rooms and several smaller ones, and a complete cooking outfit and plenty of blankets and provisions and about a bushel of onions; and the frying-pan, which had not been washed since dinner, bore evidence that onions had recently been cooked in it. And again Kel's diagnosis was verified, and Kut's pride in her went up several more notches.

After about an hour's search, they found the bandit's treasure carefully cached in three different places and some of it carefully buried. He was too foxy to put all his eggs in one basket. They not only found the Mine Company's money intact, but also found two hundred and fifty-five thousand dollars besides, and about eighteen thousand dollars' worth of diamonds and jewelry. This was indeed a find.

Kut consulted his watch and found it was 7 o'clock p. m.

"Sweetheart, suppose we remain here all night, as there is plenty of grub and things to cook with?" said Kut.

"Very well, dear; it will be a reminder of old times;" and she gave him a sweet smile that melted all the snow in the world. "And I am in favor of having *onions* for supper;" and they both smiled dryly.

Kel proceeded to get supper, while Kut went out and brot their horses in and stabled them in a big cavity where the bandit kept his horse and where he had plenty of feed and water. Then Kut proceeded to help the cook, and soon they were enjoying an excellent little supper of ham and eggs, potatoes and *onions*, with crackers and cheese and butter and real coffee. It was nice and warm away back in there and they enjoyed it to the full. And, as Kel had told the officers, the cuss *was* a musician, and they found

a very fine and expensive silver-mounted guitar and fine banjo—both with a Barcelona mark on them.

“Most likely that is where he originally hailed from,” observed Keldora.

After they had the money and jewelry all sorted out and packed up for the journey back to town the next day, they tuned up the instruments and for about two hours the lovers had a music-fest—a real soul-treat—as they could play together perfectly.

“Oh, aren’t these instruments just grand!” exclaimed Kel, after playing them both awhile.

“The greatest I ever saw,” admitted Kut.

“We’ll sure keep these and take them home with us. I didn’t know there were such fine and wonderful instruments made. Why, the poor devil must have been a real musician and more or less of a poet,” sighed Kel as she thot of his untimely death—and at her hands, too.

“How about all this money, dear?” asked Kut as they were sorting it into piles and tying it up.

“I think we deserve some of it, for if we hadn’t found it, the chances are it would never have been found,” meditated Kel.

“Very well; I suggest that we keep one hundred thousand dollars for ourselves and turn the balance and the jewelry over to the officers of Helena,” said Kut.

“All but this wonderful canary diamond, for I am just crazy about it and it fits my finger perfectly,” and Kel had it on her finger and was admiring it. It was a wonderful three-karat stone of uncanny and supernatural brilliancy of the first water, and I don’t blame the girl for wanting it.

After a hearty breakfast the next morning, they packed their treasures on the horses and rode leisurely back to town, and went to Walden’s home first and left the wonderful guitar and banjo and the part they intended to keep, and then, with Zen and Walden, they carried the rest of the money and the jewelry to the Mayor’s office and he notified the superintendent of the mine.

The mine’s money had not even been opened and every cent was there. The superintendent counted out the twenty thousand dollars reward and paid it to Kel and she suggested that if the rightful owners of the other one hundred and fifty-five thousand dollars could not be found, the money be turned over to the hospital fund to help endow the institution; and the same with the jewelry.

“How in the world did you ever find his cave so quickly?”

asked the mine official, and he looked his profound amazement and admiration.

"*Onions!*" smiled Kel in her sweetest and most provoking manner.

"What on earth has onions to do with it?" asked the Mayor in more amazement.

Then Kel laughingly told of the search and how she at last smelled onions and knew they must come from his den where he had been cooking them, and that guided them right to the place.

"Well, of all the wonderful detective work this takes the gold medal!" exclaimed the Mayor. "Mr. Badd, I want to congratulate you again," and the Mayor shook Kut's hand and then reached for Kel's hand, who smiled and said:

"Gentlemen, you see that we women do amount to something—even if you all are too narrow and selfish to want us to vote."

"Never again will I oppose woman suffrage!" fervently shouted the Mayor, and every man present said "Amen!"

The news of how Kel and Kut had found the outlaw's cache by the aid of onions soon spread, and everyone had a big laff and exclaimed:

"Nothing is impossible to the Little Suffrajet! She is a super-woman and her husband is the luckiest man in all the world!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ROAD THAT LEADS BACK HOME.

They all went back to Walden's home, and that night the Governor entertained all four of them at a theater party, and it was a happy and memorable event and enjoyed by all.

Walden soon straightened out their mine and had it paying big dividends, and as he had a very flattering offer for it, he wired his father asking what to do, and the old Captain wired back:

"Sell it and come home."

That settled it; besides, both Walden and his wife longed to get back to their dear old Ozarks and be among their kin and loved ones.

The next day Walden sold the mine to a company from St. Paul and cleared more than four hundred thousand dollars on it, besides the eighty thousand dollars it had paid him since he assumed the management of it. The new company offered him thirty thousand dollars a year to remain and be their superintendent; but his

longing for the old folks at home and the dear old hills and *The Catfish* were too strong to be resisted; besides, Zen was also homesick and just wouldn't live so far away from Kel, and Kel said she couldn't think of being so far away from her little Zenda; so it was all settled and in a few days the four happy mortals started on the LOVERS' LANE THAT LEADS BACK HOME; and oh, how they all enjoyed the trip! They stopped off two days in Butte, three days in St. Apolis and Minne Paul, a day in Omaha, and three days in Kansas City, and then on to Springfield, Missouri.

While in St. Paul, they all went out and paid Captain Burton and his family a brief visit. When the bluff old river man was introduced to Kut by Kel, he stared in amazement and exclaimed: "Well, sufferin' catfish! but, little girl, you sure picked out a *man*." And the way the old Captain grasped Kut's hand bore full testimony to his sincerity.

Colonel Storm met the four lovers at Springfield with four horses, and when Kel and Zen saw Prince and Wingie, they were indeed happy and their joy knew no bounds. Pauline was over visiting with the Storms and had ridden Wingie, and the Colonel knew how delighted Zen would be to have her own beloved little mare again; and Wingie and Prince recognized their beloved mistresses at sight, and ran to them and rubbed their noses against them just like they used to do in the old days at Nashville.

Kel had not wired her parents of her sudden and romantic marriage, as she wished to surprise them. She merely wrote to him to bring *four* horses, as she had a *guest*; so her father had no idea who the guest was; anyway, it was all right if it was Kel's guest.

"Daddy, meet my guest, Mr. Kutly Badd, who is also my *husband*!" and the little witch just laffed as the two stalwart men clasped hands and looked each over critically.

"Well, you little rascal, you! to not tell us a thing about it—just spoke of him as a *guest*!" and he gathered her to his heart and kissed and squeezed her till Kut was almost jealous.

"And you sure got a man, my child;" and he looked his son-in-law over carefully and then put his arm around Kut's broad and athletic shoulders and said: "My son, I am well pleased with you, and I wish you and Kel every happiness. She has promised me and her mother that she would bring her husband home to live here with us, where there is plenty of land and room for us all; so I am delighted to welcome you home."

"Thank you, Father Storm; and I shall always try to be a faithful and dutiful son;" and Kut returned the elder man's caress and hand-clasp with interest.

As Kel saw that her daddy was pleased with her choice, she was indeed happy. And oh, to be on her beloved Prince again! What joy! Her cup was full and running over; and Zen and Walden would also be near her. Was ever a girl so supremely happy?

They went to a hotel and remained that night, and took in a good performance at the Baldwin Theater; and the next morning, bright and early, they all started for home, and it was a happy party and a joyful ride. Sometimes the girls would let Wingie and Prince out and ride on ahead for awhile, and then they would drop back and ride with their husbands, and sometimes Kel would ride with her father for awhile.

They reached home about 9 o'clock, and Mrs. Storm and Aunt Millic had a bountiful repast ready for the prodigals, and they all enjoyed it, too. But when Mrs. Storm learned that the *guest* was her *son-in-law*, she was almost bumped off the Christmas tree; however, she recovered instantly and gave him a welcome that put the last finishing touch to his happiness and to Kel's.

"I'm so glad, Kel, that you picked out a big man—a real, sure-nuff man!" and they all smiled as Mrs. Storm continued to look Kut over from syntax to harvest.

Poor Kut simply could not keep back the blushes, but he managed to stammer:

"I'm so glad you're pleased with me, *mother*;" and the look of love and gratitude he gave her warmed her heart to him at once; "and I shall try my best to always be a dutiful son and make your daughter happy," simply and modestly said the boy.

Then they all fell to and enjoyed the supper, and Kel asked a thousand questions about one thing or another.

"And, daddy," said Kel, "Kut is a real musician, and our voices just track beautifully together."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Mrs. Storm, "for you are so crazy about music it would be a mistake if your husband was not a musician;" and she smiled a sweet look at Kut, and he blushed again, but looked foolishly happy.

"And, mamma, he's promised me that he will *always* obey me in everything," and Kel gave her husband a mocking smile; they all laughed heartily at that, and the Colonel dryly remarked:

"Of course, we could all guess that," and he reached over and

gave her a hug, and then turned to Kut with: "And you'd better keep that promise, young man."

"Yes, I've come to the same conclusion already," replied Kut; and they all laughed at Kel's blushes.

The Storms just made Walden and Zenda stay there and rest a week before continuing their journey to the Vancefield home. That was a week never to be forgotten.

Then it was arranged for Pauline to return with her brother, and Kel and Zen made arrangements to visit each other every three months, and Pauline would soon be married and live about midway between the Storms and Vancefields, so they could stop off there and visit her on their way back and forth.

Pauline married a fine young man who was well to do, and his name was Page Blanton; he came from good stock on both sides, and it was a real love-match all around.

While Kut was in Minneapolis he returned the money he *borrowed* from the South Dakota bank and with six per cent interest added; so that transaction was off his mind and he felt infinitely better on account of it.

About three years later, Kel got a letter with a Canadian stamp and post-mark, which read:

"DEAR MISS STORM,—I am the ex-bandit that you shot and captured on the train that day. I soon got back to Canada, where there was nothing against me, and immediately reformed, and have lived an honest and upright life ever since. About a year after I escaped, I met and married the dearest little French girl in all the world, and we have a beautiful little girl, whom we have named Kel.

"I attribute my reformation to you and the kind way you treated me after my capture. I remember the look of pity you gave me, instead of one of hate—as I had a right to expect. I have read of your wonderful exploits, and shall always hold your memory in reverence.

"Sincerely yours,

L. C. T."

This letter gave Kel real joy, for she hated to be compelled to turn him over to the tender mercies of the police, but she had no other alternative at the time.

About eighteen months later, Walden and Zen were blessed with a son and they named him *Nuston*, and three years later a beautiful little girl came to bless their lives, and as she was a liv-

ing image of Kel, she was named *Kelta Woodbine Vancefield*.

About two and a half years after Kel married, she had a daughter that was a replica of Zen, and named her *Zenden Lucile Badd*; and her son, who arrived three years later, was named *Kumdon Kuston Badd*.

The Colonel and Mrs. Storm grew fonder of their son-in-law every year and just worshiped their grandchildren; and Kel and Kut were ever ideally happy. It was a beautiful sight on summer evenings to see the four of them out in the big grapevine swing, playing and singing together.

Walden and Zenda were just as happy and devoted to each other, and the Vancefields just worshiped Zen and idolized her children.

And the happiest hours of the old Captain's life were when Kut and Kel came over to visit them and they all drifted along the White River in *The Catfish*. And how the stormy old man liked to dream in this Valhalla, as his declining steps tottered toward the West! How he always liked to recall the summer day that brought Kel and Zen to his door!

Colonel Storm and his wife became about twenty years younger after Kut and Kel came to live with them; and it was a happy sight to see the four of them mount their horses and, with their instruments, ride away in the hills and spend the day singing and playing and just dreaming—and *living*.

Kel devoted considerable time to writing and in the next ten years gave the world some real literature—in the form of seven books and several plays and a number of songs and two operas; and she painted several canvases that attracted much attention, but she would no more part with a painting than with one of her children.

And her husband always *obeyed* her, for she was *The Suffrajet*, and her great love and humanity conquered all she met—man or beast. Her wonderful personality drew all hearts to her, and none ever wanted to get away. She had all sorts of positions offered her, but just her own little love-nest in the dear old Ozarks and a simple and natural life with the birds and flowers and trees, and her own loved ones about her, was the only life she craved—the only fame that reached the spot and tasted like a square meal.

THE END.

A STRANGE CASE.

CHAPTER I.

Kumdon Jacquez Spry was a tall and well-built young man of excellent ancestry on both sides. He was born and reared in West Virginia, not far from Wheeling, and learned to swim in the Ohio River when he was but six years old. His father was a hardy mountaineer of the same State, but his mother came from Maryland.

Kumdon showed early symptoms of literary talent and an inclination to write and paint. His nature was a dreamy and romantic one, and his mind naturally drifted to the occult and mysterious—in fact, anything unusual or the least bit mysterious had an interest for him. His blood was also well supplied with the *wanderlust* germs. He was also very fond of music and athletic sports. The narrow and hard life of the mountainer farmer did not appeal to him at all. His dreamy and poetic nature came from his mother's side of the house. Her people embraced a long line of writers, artists, and musicians and several brilliant military leaders. Kumdon's father was a poor farmer of the hill variety and inclined to dreaming and moonshining rather than work.

At the time the events of this story occurred (1876), the educational facilities of West Virginia were very limited, and especially was this true of the country and mountainous districts. Most of the teaching was done by circuit-riders during the winter months, and this kind of an education was mostly moonshine about the "*Next World*" and similar pious bunk. The real object of all such education is to keep the poor boobs in mental darkness, so they won't notice the clever hands that deftly pick their pockets. This fact dawned on Kumdon's mind when he was about fifteen years old.

An erratic and broad-minded artist from effete Boston was spending his vacation in the old hills about Wheeling one summer, and a sudden and severe storm drove him post-haste to the Spry log-house home nestling in a ravine about half-way up the side of the mountain. Of course, the stranger was given shelter and extended the hospitality of the place. He remained that evening and until the following afternoon, when the storm had abated, then he took leave of his host and family.

Kumdon was fifteen years old at the time he met this strange

and talented man, and an immediate liking sprang up between the boy and the man. That night the artist showed the boy a few things about drawing—how to draw a horse, a cow, a dog, etc. The lad showed such aptness in learning art that he begged his father to let him guide the artist around in the vicinity and take lessons from him during his stay in the neighborhood.

The artist, Palmert Vellos, was a man of considerable wealth, and was so pleased and touched by the simple kindness and genuine hospitality of the mountain folk that he offered to take Kumdon under his tutelage and render him all the assistance in his power, but declined to accept any remuneration for it. So it was decided to let Kumdon accompany Monsieur Vallos on his rambles and try out his hand at the painting game.

Kumdon not only got valuable knowledge in the art line from M. Vallos, but he got many other new and wonderful ideas about life and the great world outside the narrow confines of West Virginia. He learned, among other things, that the great universe was eternal and existed and performed in accordance with natural law instead of being created out of NOTHING and arbitrarily brought into existence by some unknown Being. He also learned that man knows nothing about "another world" and has no relation to any world but this one and his fellow-creatures. These few simple natural facts greatly cleared the lad's mind of its cobwebs and laid the foundation for a real education, which the youth was determined to have.

"My boy," said M. Vallos to Kumdon, "you must always be honest, sincere, kind, courteous, clean, and natural, and always be sure of yourself and your ground, and never take anything for granted."

"That's just the way I feel about it and the way I want to do," returned the lad gratefully.

"The best way to be successful and happy is to behave yourself, play the Game of Life fairly, keep your nose at home, and do your best to make others happy," continued M. Vallos. "This is about the sum total of philosophy, and should be your aim in life;" and he patted the boy on his head and received a smile of assent and gratitude in return.

The artist gave the boy several good books to read and helped him to understand them; and when the time came for M. Vallos to return to the great city of schools, art, and crookedness, he gave Kumdon more than a dozen splendid books—the kind of literature

that causes the soul to grow and expand and is broadening, helpful, and civilizing.

Monsieur Vallos spent many a Sunday and evening at the Spry home and also became a great friend of the family. At first, as is the case with all strangers, the elder Spry had very serious doubts about the artist being a "revenooer," as the Federal agents are designated by the natives—whether said natives are in the moonshine business or not. For two days the elder Spry secretly kept the boy and his new friend under strict surveillance; after that he was satisfied the artist was genuine and became very friendly toward him, and so did his family and the few nabors who met M. Vallos.

The artist painted an excellent picture of the Spry home and yard with the mountain for a background, and he set the boy to making a copy of it. After a few trials, Kumdon made quite a creditable copy of it, and this pleased the old folks very much and the boy was simply swelled up like war prices and city rents. The artist presented this rare canvas to the elder Spry.

On the 2d of October, M. Vallos very reluctantly packed up his brushes and palette and returned to Boston.

Kumdon promised to write to his new friend, and his first letter caused the artist many a smile. Here it is *verbatim*:

"Lone Rige West Virginnny; okT, 27—187——.

Dere fren: I wil rite you a fue lynes to let you kno that We be all wel and hope you all ar the same. we shure do all mis you all dredful and hope you wil com back sum time agen. WE ar al wel cept'n paw an wun ov the sheepe, aNd it dide last nite, but paw he haz gud helthe. MaW and sis went blackberry'n erbot tu weKs ergo and kild er Big blAcksnaK an 3 squrls, besids pik'n 4 galns uv Berys Sumboddy piznd OL' Hijump ther houn, and paw lowd mayby it wuz wun ov Ol' MaN jaCksons niggers; anYway the houn woz getn tew old tu mont tu much and paw lowd mayby ther nigger wood get snakbit and di in hiz sins. HanK sanders old gra mare wus struK by litnin an Old ant MarY Martyne haz toòthacke in hur easte Jaw. Sum OV the foks herabots stiL think mayBy you wuZ er Revenuer, but paw 'lowd they wuz fools, an i Offerd to lick JaKe peters fert hinkn it, but he Had tu much yaller In him ter fite. wel I ges this iss erbot awl, exsept the nuw techur we'r goin tew hav this Wintere, and he's frum oHio and tha du saye heze a gude Man hopeing We all here Frum you awl soone.

"EVer yOur Tru fren

KUMDON."

"Some letter!" mused M. Vallos to himself. "However, the youngster is a diamond in the ruff and will come out in the clear eventually."

The artist made a correct typewritten copy of the letter and sent it to Kumdon with a short and friendly one of his own, and told the boy to compare the two and thus find out how many mistakes he made and just what mistakes.

The next letter of the boy's was about a 60 per cent improvement, and each letter continued to improve until he was able to write a correct and really interesting epistle.

CHAPTER II.

KUMDON BECOMES AN ARTIST.

The artist's interest in the boy was really the cause of a great career on the part of the lad.

Many a tree would have flourished and borne excellent fruit if it had been provided with the right kind of soil and temperature and had been given plenty of moisture when it needed it. Millions of human trees perish or live a fruitless existence on account of being denied proper environment and education. This is one of the saddest tragedies under an obsolete system of *Dollarized Religion*; or, Getting Something for Nothing.

With the assistance of the artist and the right kind of books to read, Kumdon made rapid strides up the ladder of education; and as he now knew the right principles of drawing and painting, he made wonderful strides in his beloved hobby, "makin' picturs," as he used to call it.

Kumdon's father was interested in the wonders and possibilities of art and a real education and he encouraged Kumdon to pursue his studies, and required but little farm labor from him.

When Kumdon was a little past seventeen years old, he went up to Wheeling early in May with his father and two of the nabors with about sixty head of cattle belonging to the three farmers jointly. Out of this number Kumdon owned three steers, which brot him \$52.80.

As it was late in the day when the stock was marketed, the farmers decided to remain in the city till the following day, so they could see a little of the bright lights and thus have some real news for their nabors when they returned home. Just as they finished their suppers at a restaurant near the river, a packet came to the wharf and began to discharge its passengers and cargo.

"Dad," said Kumdon, "I'm goin' down and watch the boat awhile," and the lad was off like a rocket.

The boat was soon ready to proceed on its way down the river, and just as the boat-hands began to pull up the gangplank, Kumdon made a run and jump and landed on deck just in time.

"Well, my boy, where are you bound for?" inquired the Mate, as he saw the lad make the run and jump for the deck.

"No place in particular, I reckon," replied Kumdon; "I've made up my mind to see the world from the outside and make my own way, so I'm just starting to carve out a career of some kind;" and he looked the man squarely in the eye and never flinched.

"Good!" exclaimed the Mate. "I like to hear a rooster crow that way; it means he's a game cock and has no yellow in his make-up. What can you do, bub?" and he laid his ponderous hand on the boy's shoulder in a kind and encouraging way.

"I want to be an artist and a reporter—to write and draw pictures," said Kumdon.

"*Huh!* Some boy!" exclaimed the Mate. "What can you draw, youngster?"

"Oh, 'most anything, I guess—a man, a horse, or a cow, or this *boat*," replied Kumdon; and he looked around the wonderful craft with pride and growing interest. It was the second boat he ever saw, and of course it was a wonderberry to his verdant and hungry mind.

"All right, my hearty," said the Mate; "we'll make a necktie out of the first rainbow that shows up for you; and in the meantime it behooves me to duly present you to the captain of this worthy craft. Come alongside, my hearty young rookie, and I'll give Captain Stephens the pleasure of your acquaintance." Then he piloted the boy to the Captain's castle and duly introduced the youngster to that important individual. "Captain Stephens, meet Mr. Kumdon Jacquez Spry, a very *spry* youth, who says he is an artist and writer and is just butting the universe in the slats in the way of carving out a career for himself," facetiously exclaimed the Mate in a friendly way.

"Glad to meet you, Captain Kidd," said the Captain, and he grasped the boy's hand in a warm and hearty clasp that made the blood tingle in the youngster's veins. "And so ye be an artist?"

"Yes, I can draw a little and have a taste for that line of work," modestly admitted the boy.

"Very well, my hearty," continued the Captain; "we'll see what you can do to-morrow. I don't know but we need some real art on this prosaic old tub. Mack, give the young rooster a bunk and see that he has plenty to eat, and tie a life-preserver and an anchor to him, so he won't get lost and drowned if he falls overboard. Just amuse yourself, Mr. Gulliver, and when you get sleepy hit the hay. Good-night and pleasant dreams."

Kumdon went down on deck, being attracted by the banjo and the singing and dancing of the darkies—the deck-hands. This was a revelation and a treat to the lad, for he never saw such wonderful stunts before. Kumdon was no mean performer on the banjo, guitar, and fiddle himself. After watching them awhile, he hunted up "Mack" (*McDaniels*) and asked for a big piece of paper or something he could draw on. The Mate happened to have some big cardboards that were 36x44 and he supplied the youngster with one and told him to go to it.

Kumdon returned to the festivities down on deck and began to make a sketch of the whole deck and the negroes dancing and singing in their grotesque and weird way. He soon had a splendid picture; and, with the colored pencils he had procured that day in Wheeling, he was well prepared to make real pictures and color them true to life.

The Mate was so pleased with the picture that he at once carried it and the boy to the Captain. That ruff but kind old man was delighted with it and praised it highly. He also petted Kumdon and had the lad eat with him after that and introduced him as his guest. This was an endorsement that greatly helped the boy and at once made him a favorite on the boat.

The next day the young artist went ashore at the towns where the boat remained for any length of time, and soon had a good sketch of the whole craft, shore, wharf, and all; and, what was better, he caught a good view of the Captain conversing with two ladies in his pilot-house, and the Captain was pointing out the places of interest about the town, etc. Kumdon caught a good view of them all in flattering poses and soon had it on the canvas. Of course, the Captain never dreamed that he and the ladies were posing for their pictures, and when Kumdon showed the finished picture the next day, the old man gasped and exclaimed:

"Well, shiver my timbers! but that is real art; and you young pirate, you caught the old man right in the midst of it;" then he drew the lad to him and gave him a hug that would have made a

grizzly bear ashamed of its squeezing abilities. "As soon as we reach Cincinnati I'm going to have this picture framed and hung up in the cabin downstairs, where the passengers can all see it and admire it; and I should like to have another one to hang in my home in Cincinnati;" and he looked at the boy inquiringly.

"Certainly, sir," said Kumdon; "I shall be pleased to make another for you;" and the boy blushed with pride and happiness.

When the boat reached the Ohio metropolis four days later, Kumdon had many more interesting sketches he had made along the route; he finished several of these for his good friend, Captain Stephens.

As the boat was approaching Cincinnati, the boy asked Captain Stephens how much he owed him for fare, board, etc.

"Why, not a cent, you young pirate," replied the Captain; "you've been my guest and I have greatly enjoyed your company, and the pictures more than pay your fare, etc. What are you going to do when we reach port at Cincinnati?"

"Well, I hardly know," replied Kumdon; "get a job if I can. I want to be a reporter and make pictures for the paper, etc., if they will have me;" and he looked rather doubtful.

"How much money have you?" kindly asked the Captain.

"Very little," admitted the youth; "but I can work hard and soon save up some money;" and he gave the Captain a determined look.

"You're the right kind, my boy," continued the Captain, "and I know you will succeed. But you had better come along out to my place and stay there until you can get a job. We've got a couple of spare rooms, and we have no children. We have a girl about your age—my niece—and you won't be a bit lonesome; and any time you want to go back up to Wheeling to see your people it won't cost you a cent."

So the Captain carried the boy out to his quiet little suburban home and introduced him to his wife and niece.

Mrs. Stephens was a quiet and intellectual little woman, with strong maternal instincts and a deep and wide sympathy for the human race. She received Kumdon cordially and bade him welcome to their home.

The niece was a pretty little brunette about seventeen years old, and a music student. She was vivacious and lively and had a decidedly romantic temperament. She liked Kumdon from the time they met, and proceeded to make things comfortable for him. Her

name was about as odd and romantic as Kumdon's and this was another tie that drew them toward one another.

"What an odd and pretty name you have, Mr. Spry!" exclaimed the girl as soon as he had spelled and pronounced it for her and the missus.

"I am so glad you like it," said Kumdon; "and what is your name?"

"Well, Uncle Langdon always teases me about my romantic name," said the girl, "but I like it and I think it just suits me. It is *Yulvern Vecil Stephens*. When my daddy got killed in a boat explosion I came to live with Uncle Langdon, and he's just the best uncle in all the world; but he loves to tease me;" and she went over to where her bluff old uncle was sitting by the window and wound a pretty white arm around his willing neck and kissed him. "But you must not tease Kumdon so much, uncle, for I can see that he is bashful;" and she gave the boy a sweet look that tuned up the stars for him and made them all sing together.

"Never you mind, Yulvern," said the Captain; "that young pirate will give a good account of himself in any kind of a bout;" and the old sea dog laffed good-naturedly. "Why the second day out from Wheeling," continued the Captain, "a smart young fop about twenty years old saw Kumdon sketching and at once proceeded to guy him. The first thing any of us knew the two were grappling like a couple of professionals, and before Mack or me could get to them, we saw the gay young bird go over the rail and into the water with a might splash! and that bashful young pirate there leaned against the rail and smiled as serenely as a June night on the Suwanee River in Florida. If it hadn't been for the quick action of the niggers in getting a rope to him, we'd a-been shy a passenger;" and the old pirate just laffed until he almost burst. "Don't you all worry about that youngster," the Captain went on; "he's a game bird all right, and can trot in 'most any class."

Kumdon remarked: "You certainly have an odd and a very pretty name, Miss Ste—"

"No, no—don't call me Miss Stephens—just *Yulvern*," said the girl, "and I'll call you Kumdon;" and her smile tangled the aorta and its pals about his heart until he had difficulty in breathing.

"Very well, *Yulvern*," said Kumdon; "it is so sweet of you to permit me to thus address you; and *Kumdon* coming from your lips will be just like Septober moonlight dreaming on the rippling water."

This last bit of poetic fervor from the boy's lips did not reach the old folks, but it sent a thrill over the girl's nerves that painted landscapes in her soul and zigzagged the vines and flowers across her heart.

CHAPTER III.

KUMDON GETS A JOB.

Captain Stephens remained home two days before starting on his next trip to Wheeling. Before leaving, he wrote a letter of introduction and recommendation for Kumdon, in which he spoke of the boy in the warmest and highest terms. With this letter he had no trouble in getting a job on a big daily paper—as a reporter; and as Kumdon was also an artist and cartoonist, he was able to illustrate his reports and stories, and the city editor at once recognized the value of these little illustrated news items and storyets. He spoke of it to the Big Finger and that astute individual at once gave the boy a raise of ten dollars a week—which now brought his salary up to twenty-five dollars a week—a very comfortable sum in the young man's eyes. He was started at fifteen dollars a week and promised more if he made good. Kumdon possessed a rare sense of humor and a true insight into the reality of things. He was quick to detect the incongruities and inconsistencies in current life and he fell to taking off these inconsistencies in a humorous way with little cartoons. The management was quick to detect the value of these little innovations in a reporter, and inside of six months the lad got another increase of salary—now receiving thirty dollars a week, and being assigned to important places and events.

Kumdon was also making a big hit up at the Captain's, and he and Yulvern were real pals and comrades from the start. Their natures were tuned together like two harpstrings, and the result was a beautiful harmony and co-operation. She was delighted when she discovered the boy had musical talent and was no mean artist with the banjo, guitar, and violin. They soon learned to play together; and Yulvern played the piano and guitar and had a beautiful contralto voice, and Kumdon sang a very sweet and clear tenor, so they spent many happy hours together at their music.

Kumdon had an awful time trying to get Mrs. Stephens to accept anything for his room and board, and it was only when he declared his intention of going elsewhere that she gave in and agreed to accept three dollars a week.

The Captain and Mrs. Stephens considered Kumdon as one of

the family, and were very proud of his achievements and abilities; and his modest and courteous manners won him many friends—in fact, “the little pirate,” as the old Captain liked to call him, was doing a very satisfactory job at making good. He was climbing the ladder without a downward slip. His finding such a real friend and champion in Captain Stephens and the Captain’s family was a very fortunate thing for the boy, and especially so at a time when he needed friends and guidance.

After Kumdon had been with the paper a year he received another salary uplift of five dollars, and out of his thirty-five dollars a week he was laying up a very comfortable little sum for a rainy day. He had no bad habits nor evil companions and these facts were valuable assets. Kumdon invested quite a bit of his earnings in good books and studied diligently.

Kumdon joined an athletic club and practiced the manly art, and was fast becoming quite an athlete. He got that idea from Yulvern and anything she suggested was law to the young man. Before he had known her a week, he found himself writing her romantic name on scraps of paper—just to see how it looked. One day a month later, while waiting for a strelk (*street car*), he unconsciously (*or subconsciously*) wrote it this way: “Mrs. Kumdon Jacquez Spry.” This so frightened him he immediately tore it up and tossed the bits to the breezes. If there was any other girl in Cincinnati, Kumdon had not discovered her.

On the beginning of July of the following year, the paper told Kumdon he might have a thirty-day vacation on full pay. When he told his friends about it, the old Captain advised him to take a trip to the Crescent City—the New York of the South. New Orleans is a delightful old place in which to rummage around and enjoy a lazy and dreamy life at little expense.

Thru the Captain, Kumdon had come to know all the river men running thru Cincinnati. He had a natural fondness for the water, and never tired of the river and its teeming and erratic life. There was something mysterious and occult about the river that gripped his soul and said, “Howdy?”

The *Paducah*, a beautiful and speedy little boat, was due to depart for New Orleans in a few days, and Kumdon was introduced to its jolly Captain, Hadley Summers. Captain Summers had already heard of the young artist-reporter and was delighted to know he would have him for a passenger all the way down. Captain Stephens had spoken highly of the young man and asked that

he be accorded every courtesy, both as his friend and as a very clever reporter. As Captain Summers was an astute business man as well as an old experienced river man, he easily saw the wisdom of being especially nice to young Spry.

"Oh, Kumdon!" said Yulvern, "you'll write to me every day and a couple of times on Sundays, won't you?" and her smiles were soft and penetrating—like camphor and ether, and even more sedative in their action, for the youngster readily agreed to write every day—or *oftener*. "And oh, Kumdon, I'll just write you some of the dandiest letters and tell you everything!" exclaimed the girl in a joy of delight.

"Then my trip will indeed be a vacation and a *dream*," said Kumdon, and he gave her the look she longed for—the smile that neckties the heart with a *rainbow* and gives the soul a soft and limpid September shade to dream in.

"And oh, Kumdon," continued Yulvern, "do be careful and don't get hurt or killed, for I'd—I'd—yes, I'd *miss* you—oh, ever so much!" and then she hung her pretty head at half-mast and blushed in those wild and primeval shades that are so expressive of adolescence.

"I thank you, Yulvern, for those dear words," said Kumdon; "and if you miss me any more than I will miss you, it will be a real missing game."

And then he carefully and with exact precision harvested the girl in his arms, and—well, it's just none of our business, so I'll not intrude and try to relate the match; I'll merely add that it was a limited number of rounds without a decision—as they heard her uncle's ponderous footsteps meandering their way.

"Oh, Uncle Langdon!" exclaimed Yulvern, "I was just telling Kumdon to be very careful on his vacation and not get hurt or killed, and he has just promised to write to *us* every day—so we'll know how he is."

"Are you sure he promised to write to *us*?" asked her relative, with a merry and knowing twinkle in his starboard eye; and the way the old pirate emphasized the word "*us*" caused them both to hang their heads at half-mast and blush a violent duet.

"Now, uncle, you know *what* I mean," said Yulvern, and she sidled over to his side and wound her pretty arms around his neck and just sighed and looked happy.

"Yes, I think your uncle knows *what* you mean," replied the Captain, "for you both are blushing in italics and circus type." Then,

turning to Kumdon, he said: "Well, you young pirate, take good care of yourself and learn all you can and have a good time, and write to 'us' real often."

The lad sure did have a fine time on his Southern trip, and learned many new and wonderful things, and made many new sketches, and gathered lots of data for future use in his profession. Some of this new material he illustrated and sent to his paper, and the management were so delighted with it and his rare descriptive abilities, they at once wrote and told him that when his vacation was up they had decided to send him on an extended trip thru the Southern States and to have him write-up the territory in a bright and breezy way and illustrate it. This just suited Kumdon, for it gave him the opportunity he wanted to travel and see more of the country.

They arranged a trip that would keep Kumdon busy till December. He was given *carte blanche* to stay as long in each town as he deemed necessary in order to get next to everything connected with it that would be worth writing up, etc.

"Use plenty of color, and make all your stories vivid and vibrant with life and human interest," wrote the management; "and don't spare expense where it is necessary to get the materials you need. We want hot and sizzling stuff that will thrill our readers and make them like the paper. Go to it, young man, and draw on us for anything you need."

There was one little girl in Cinci that did not like this arrangement at all, but her uncle soon convinced her that it was a big boost for the boy, and she must bear it all patiently.

"Why, just think of it!" said Captain Stephens to Yulvern; "he has only been here about two years and is now getting fifty dollars a week and his expenses, and assigned to such an important trip. The little pirate has sure climbed up rapidly and is still climbing."

"But, uncle, it's so lonesome without him," rejoined Yulvern.

"Oh, sure!" said the Captain. "But isn't he writing to 'us' real often?" and the old pirate gave Yulvern a hearty hug and was off.

Yulvern protested the cruelty of Fate, but she had to content herself with Kumdon's letters and pour out her budding soul in her letters to him. The boy sure did write his little sweetheart some beautiful and interesting letters, and the old Captain enjoyed these

bubbling and effusive epistles about as much as did his romantic niece.

Early in December the traveler returned and was so greatly changed they hardly knew him. He was about an inch taller and about fifteen pounds heavier, but greatly improved in every way, and with a mental cargo that made his keel scrape the bottom. He had not forgotten Yulvern and she had been true and loyal to him.

"Just think, dear Kumdon," said Yulvern, "I'll finish high school next year and in two years I expect to finish in music, and then I'll—well, I hardly know what I'll do—in fact, I haven't quite decided on a career yet."

"Perhaps it will be time enuff then to think of the future," said Kumdon; and he took her in his arms and gave her a squeeze that blotted out all such trifling things as futures. "Besides, I need someone with a pretty face and an odd name to help me make my success a real achievement and color it with the bright and fadeless hues of happiness;" and their lips met in one of those one hundred and sixty-nine per cent kisses that color every flower and keep the wings up in the air—the kind of caresses that make every star green with envy; even the Man in the Moon moistens his lips hard every time he sees one of that kind of kisses put across.

"Oh, Kumdon," said Yulvern, "how sweet and romantic it will be to live this life as a duet! and that will make it a success for us both. But I won't ever let you go off on any more long trips unless you take me with you."

"Well, little sweetheart," replied Kumdon, "that is just what I should do after we are married; and I don't think the paper will send me out again soon. However, if they give me an assignment like that, I must be Johnny-on-the-Spot and make good."

"Y-e-s—I suppose so," said Yulvern; "but I hope they won't send you away any more till after we are married."

"So do I, precious," continued Kumdon. "But we will plow right thru the clouds—no matter what they are;" and they sealed their vows with another all-soul and Vast Forever kiss that makes faces at Death and says "*Howdy?*" to Eternity. They were very happy now, and there were no such animals as clouds.

Kumdon's trip was a big success in every way and made a big hit in newspaper circles. The young artist-reporter had several very flattering offers from other big papers, but he declined to leave the paper that had been so good to him and that had given him his first job.

The following May he obtained a short vacation for a home trip, as his mother's health was failing rapidly, and his father had written and asked that he come home on a visit for awhile anyway. Kumdon's trip home with the old Captain was a very delightful event and recalled many beautiful memories. His mother rapidly recovered after seeing her boy again. He remained home three weeks, and made many rare sketches, which he used later for the paper.

Yulvern arranged a sweet surprise for Kumdon. She went up to Wheeling with her uncle and arranged it so she and Kumdon could return together, and oh, what a joy-trip it was! Kumdon did not know that she was aboard until he met her on the boat. Captain Stephens played it on the boy in good shape. As the two men walked on the boat, the Captain casually remarked:

"Kumdon, I want you to meet an old friend of mine who is going down with us this trip."

"Delighted, I'm sure," said Kumdon. "Who is he?"

"Wait and see, young impatience," replied the Captain; then he opened the cabin door and presented his niece.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Kumdon. "And this is a pleasure I never anticipated."

"The little witch planned it all herself," said the Captain, "and I am only an accessory."

"But equally guilty," laughed the boy, as he wound his arm around Yulvern's shoulders and strolled back toward the piano, where they proceeded to sing some of their favorite songs together.

The home-trip was a dream never to be forgotten. The weather was ideal, and all the couple had to do was just to love and dream—and live, and they sure did it to the full. A full moon was skying the warm pulsing nights, and all Nature seemed bent on serenading them. And the old Captain's cup was at flood-tide, for he had only had success since he met and befriended the poor boy that Chance and Fate threw aboard his craft—the *Water Queen*; and it was the dearest wish of his life that Kumdon and Yulvern marry and live with him and the missus.

CHAPTER IV.

KUMDON A HERO.

It was the last of May when the lovers got back to the city and they both buckled in and worked harder than ever. Yulvern had to finish high school before she could think of getting married,

and Kumdon had so many books to read and so many things he wanted to accomplish. Kumdon arranged with the paper to have only day work assigned him, in order that he might have the evenings with his affianced.

At the time these events took place the rolks (*automobiles*) were unknown. The favorite mode of traveling about the city was with a horse and buggy or with two horses and a buggy or carriage.

Kumdon was returning from covering a big fashionable wedding up on Walnut Hill about the center of June when his attention was attracted by the wild and frantic yells of an elderly man trying to persuade a madly-fleeing horse to slow down to a decorous rate of speed and not fracture the speed limits. The animal was a high-brow critter from a famous Kentucky stable and had plenty of temperament and pep. He had become frightened or maddened at something or other and decided to mutiny right then and there by showing his master, old Dr. Templeton Saunders, how to run in the Daniel Patch class. The first plunge of the cantankerous beast had jerked the lines out of the Doctor's nervous hands and that left the man with absolutely no means of stopping him except with *speech*, and that is a very poor cork for stopping a runaway animal with pep and temperament, but it was all the old Doctor could do, so he yelled his best and clung to the sides and top of the buggy as best he could.

When Kumdon sighted the land-lubber coming down the street at a fifty-mile an hour rate, he sized up the situation at a glance and acted immediately by jumping out in the street and grabbing the swift-fleeing brute as he swept by almost like a cannon-ball. The boy had been raised among horses and understood them well. His grip was a success, and with both hands on the bridle and swinging all his weight on the beast's mouth and nose, he soon brot it to a stop.

The old Doctor almost collapsed as he climbed and stumbled out of the vehicle and tried to thank Kumdon for his bravery.

"Why, my brave young man," said the Doctor, "you might have lost your own life or been crippled for life by the mad beast;" and he continued to shake the reporter's hand and gaze in his face with reverent admiration.

"Oh! that was nothing, sir, I assure you," said Kumdon; "I merely did my duty, and I never think of little things like danger when Duty calls. I hope you are not hurt, sir;" and he got out his pad and pencil and began:

"I'm a reporter for the *Daily Bull*, and should like your name, sir, and the particulars of how the animal came to mutiny."

"Oh, yes; I am ever so much obliged to you," said the Doctor, "and if I can help you in any way with the facts, I shall be pleased to give them. My name is Dr. Templeton Saunders, and I live at _____."

"Doctor, aren't you connected with Ohio Medical College?" asked Kumdon.

"Well, yes; I hold the chair of mental and nervous diseases," replied the Doctor, "but it won't be necessary to go into all of that. I guess I was more scared than hurt," laughed the Doctor; "and if you don't mind, I should like to have you drive home with me and stay for dinner if you will."

"Delighted, I assure you," said Kumdon, "for we reporters have appetites like most healthy human beings;" and he clasped the Doctor's hand again.

"Hadn't you better hold the ugly brute by the bridle till I get in and get a good hold on the lines?" asked the Doctor.

"I guess that will be best; and if he don't behave like a gentleman, I'll twist his cervical vertebræ for him," laughed the boy.

"I'd like to knock his whole block off!" exclaimed the old Doctor, "for he had no reason whatever for such unseemly conduct."

Kumdon petted the animal and whispered some mysterious words in his ear and a complete change came over the brute at once. He relaxed and seemed pacified now, for he looked at the old Doctor and actually smiled and rubbed his aristocratic nose against Kumdon and seemed as docile as a mid-August night in Cuba. Then Kumdon clambered in, and the nag trotted off like a soft summer breeze playing hookey with the flowers and cypress trees of California.

"My boy," said the Doctor, "you must have hypnotized the critter, for now he is as rational as can be."

They soon reached the Doctor's beautiful suburban home, and the reporter was duly introduced to the family, consisting of a wife, a granddaughter, and a young woman teacher, who was distantly related to the missus. The incident was graphically related by the old physician, and Kumdon at once became a hero to the entire family. He found the young ladies very brilliant and highly educated and good conversationalists.

They all enjoyed a good dinner and then spent an hour very pleasantly together discussing a number of topics, but mostly the

subject of hypnotism and the *subconscious* mind and the weird stunts it often does. This was all new ground for Kumdon, and he at once got deeply interested in the subject. He himself possessed the hypnotic power to a high degree, but did not know what it was nor how to employ it. It was just a natural gift with him, and it was that strange power that inclined him so strongly to the occult or mysterious.

"Any time you can get an hour or so off, come out and I'll be glad to unfold this wonderful subject to you," exclaimed the old man, for it was his hobby and in line with his college work, and he had plenty of material in his private practice, as well as in the clinics up at the college.

Here was a virgin field for the reporter and right in line with his natural inclinations—and a *professor* ready to conduct him thru its mysterious caverns and weird nooks and dells.

"I thank you, Doctor," said Kumdon; "and I shall avail myself of your kind offer, for I am greatly interested in the subject and should like to learn all I can about it; besides, I think I can find plenty of material for a story or two for the *Daily Bull*;" and they all smiled pleasantly.

"Yes, I can dig up some real stuff for you if that is your idea, Mr. Spry," said the Doctor. "If you will meet me at my office on West Ninth Street a week from to-day at 4 o'clock, I'll bring you home for dinner, and after dinner we'll retire to my den and I'll relate a case that will make your hair curl."

"Good!" exclaimed Kumdon. "That is just what I want—something unusual for the *Daily Bull*—something that will outdo all the other papers and their most vivid writers;" and he chuckled inwardly at this piece of good luck. Then he bade his new friends good-bye and hurried to the office, and soon he had ready a half-column thriller with a realistic illustration.

This little episode was a rich morsel for the other doctors and the rival college, and many of them considered it a clever advertising stunt on the part of Dr. Saunders. The Doctor was a man well up in the seventies and quite wealthy, and did not need any advertising.

Kumdon had not only made a good impression on the Doctor, but with the entire family as well.

When Kumdon returned home that night and related the episode to Yulvern she looked a bit troubled and asked tentatively:

"Are you real sure you did not like the Doctor's granddaughter

just a little—just a wee, tinsey little?” and her deep purple eyes had a trace of fear in their bottomless depths.

“How silly!” replied Kumdon. “Why, of course I liked her in a way, but not in the way I like you, precious. You must never be jealous, Yulvern. You know we reporters have to meet all kinds of people, and it behooves us to be polite and courteous to everyone;” and he gave her a kiss that would knock a carload of fears galley-west at one blow.

“What’s her first name, Kumdon?” asked Yulvern.

“Well, my dear,” replied Kumdon, “it is sure a corker—almost as odd as your own. It is *Velden Fern Saunders* and she is really beautiful and a gifted musician. She has a voice of rare purity and wonderful sweetness and fluency;” and he smiled at the troubled look that came in his sweetheart’s love-lit eyes.

“Now I know you will like her,” said Yulvern, “for her name is so odd and pretty—even prettier than mine;” and she proceeded to pout—like her sex is wont to do.

This was Yulvern’s first attack of jealousy and it was almost as bad as the flu in a tenement-house in the slums. Kumdon finally talked her out of it by the aid of an allopathic amount of kisses and assurances that she was the only possible pebble on life’s big ocean-kissed shore; but still that name *Velden* kept washing some sharp-edged pebbles against her heart, and little dark shadows of measly fear gripped her soul.

“Dear, you remind me of little Johnny’s learned thesis on the subject of ‘Girls,’” said Kumdon. “He wrote in conclusion, ‘Girls is just funny birds that can sing, but can’t fly.’”

CHAPTER V.

DR. SAUNDERS’ STRANGE PATIENT.

The week soon rolled around, and Kumdon was promptly on hand at Dr. Saunders’ office at the specified hour.

“Ah! my young friend,” said the Doctor, “you’re prompt—a very commendable trait, I assure you.”

“I thank you, Doctor, for the compliment,” replied Kumdon; “but the promise of such a rich and rare story is enuff to make anyone prompt.”

“I have the data in the case all at hand now, as I have dug it all up from my old files and case-books,” continued the Doctor; “and I warn you to brace your nerves for the ordeal. After dinner we will retire to my private den and get our pipes going well,

and then in the dreamy and narcotic fumes I'll unfold a tale that has never been given out and is only known to myself and the relatives immediately concerned."

"All right, my good friend," said Kumdon; "I think I can stand it, and you will find me an ideal audience."

They reached the Doctor's dreamy old vine-clad place on a high bluff overlooking the historic Ohio River as it placidly meanders along to keep its eternal tryst with the Gulf of Mexico. Velden and Miss Evangeline Parker, the teacher, were out on the porch, lolling in a pretty hammock—the handiwork of Velden's own pretty white hands.

"Good evening, Mr. Spry," said Velden. "It is an unexpected pleasure to meet you so soon again," and Velden held out her pretty hand to the young reporter and gave him such a hearty hand-clasp that he knew she really meant it. "Granddaddy did not tell us that you were coming to-night, but we are so glad you have come again. You know you promised to give us the pleasure of hearing you sing the next time you came;" and she smiled at him archly.

"Did I really make such a rash promise?" asked Kumdon.

"To be sure you did," replied Velden. "Didn't he, Evangeline?" she continued, turning to the teacher.

"That is the way it sounded to me," said Evangeline, and she gave him a look that indicated that excuses would not go.

"I'm awfully sorry, ladies," said Kumdon, "for I haven't enuff money with me to pay my fine," and he looked dreadfully scared.

"Oh! and is that the trouble?" asked Velden. "Well, I'll be generous and pay the fine myself, if I cannot buy the policeman on this beat off with a custard pie;" and they all had a good laugh at this polite badinage.

"My boy, I don't see any way out of it for you," said the Doctor; "and as dinner is not quite ready yet, I think a little music right now would be appetizing;" and the good Doctor gave Kumdon a sly wink.

"Very well, then," said Kumdon, "but I trust that you will remain right by that window and keep a sharp lookout."

"With pleasure, monsieur, and both eyes," dryly remarked Miss Evangeline.

Kumdon then seated himself at the old Chickering and sang a song he had written himself, and made a big hit with them all.

"And now I should be delighted to hear from you both," said Kumdon.

Velden went to the piano and sang an old plantation melody with singular sweetness and expression.

"Splendid!" exclaimed the reporter. "I just knew from your eyes that you could out-warble the birds," and he looked into her beautiful orbs of tawny and dreamy brown and almost forgot about the story he came for.

Dinner was then announced by the old family servant, and they all enjoyed themselves to the full and discussed almost every topic under the sun. Kumdon was surprised to find how well posted the girls were on every topic approached.

Mrs. Saunders was a literary woman and her husband was the author of several large text-books on medical subjects, especially the brain and nervous ailments and mental phenomena.

The old Doctor was perfectly at home on phrenology, psychology, theosophy, telepathy, hypnotism, mental therapy, and every Oriental cult of mysticism. Moreover, he was a pleasant and charming conversationalist, who knew how to use correct and precise English. He was also versed in German, French, Spanish, Italian, Latin, and Greek—in short, a ripe scholar. His mind was as broad and liberal as the universe, and he was still a student.

The Doctor's charming granddaughter was a chip off the old ancestral block and just burgeoning into her twentieth year—a rare and radiant little flower, with a bright and vivacious manner that rendered her very charming and attractive.

A full hour was spent at the dinner, for the Doctor believed in dining like a gentleman of the old school—and not jitney it down like a business man or a railroader on duty.

Kumdon had to sing again for the girls and then he and both girls sang a triet together.

"Well, my boy, if you are ready, we will now proceed to my den on the next floor," said the Doctor, "and I will draw aside the curtain on as strange a case as ever happened." "And remember, Velden," he continued, addressing his granddaughter, "I am not to be disturbed under any circumstances."

"Very well, grampum," said Velden; "but I think it just awful to take Mr. Spray away off up there to your den of horrors and monopolize him all evening."

"Tut, tut, my child!" replied the Doctor; "he will make a big hit with the story I have for him; besides, he now knows where

we live and he also knows how welcome he will always be here.”

“I thank you, Doctor,” said Kumdon, “and I hope to always merit your good-will; and it will be a pleasure, I’m sure, to spend as much time out here as I can spare from my duties;” and he gave Velden a dreamy look that she wrapped her heart up in as she went out on the portico to dream and wait.

THE DOCTOR’S VISITOR.

“Yes, take that big rocker over there near the window and you will be entirely comfortable,” said the Doctor.

“It was late in September one afternoon about 4 o’clock when I was disturbed by a timid but distinct knock on my laboratory door,” continued the Doctor. “Yes, I used to dabble a great deal in chemistry, and it is still a pleasing pastime. I opened the door, and was confronted by a very stylish but severely plain little woman of about thirty-eight years of age.

“‘I beg pardon, but is this Dr. Saunders himself?’ she politely inquired in perfect English.

“‘Yes, madam; you are addressing Dr. Saunders *himself*,’ I replied. ‘I never had a partner or assistant. Just come right over here to my private office—I never receive anyone in the laboratory. Here we are—just take that easy rocker there, and please remove your veil, as I always like to study the character of my patients thru their faces.’

“‘Really, Doctor,’ said my visitor, ‘I should prefer not to remove my veil—for the present, at least; and I did not call on you for an analysis of my character, but to consult you about my *three-natured* husband,’ and her tone had a ring of finality about it.

“‘Oh! very well,’ I said; ‘if you prefer not to reveal your face, I’ll waive that point, and we’ll get right down to business.’

“‘Thank you, Doctor,’ replied my visitor.

“‘Very well, madam; now for your story,’ I continued.

“‘I am now Mrs. La Salle Verndon,’ said my visitor, ‘and my husband is a civil engineer and surveyor, and we have lived in Cincinnati about three years. The first two years after our marriage we lived in Louisville, Kentucky. My father is a prominent railroad promoter and engineer; and he met Mr. Verndon in Nashville about six months before we were married. He was so taken with Mr. Verndon’s brilliancy and charming ways, he invited the young man to call on him if he were ever in Louisville. A few months later he was in Louisville on business and called on papa, as he had

promised to do. Father brought him out to our home and he remained for dinner. We were all charmed by his brilliant and charming ways. I am a musician, and when he heard me sing and play he also gave us a surprise by doing some of the most wonderful stunts on the piano and in the vocal line. I felt ashamed of my poor efforts after his brilliant performance. Well, he seemed just as fond of us as we did of him, and was a frequent caller at our home. He paid ardent court to me, but in such a courteous and gentlemanly way that I gave consent to his proposal of marriage, and my parents both considered it a brilliant match.

“‘We were united in marriage just four months after meeting, and in about a week we moved into a beautiful little cottage, and settled down to a very romantic and happy life. After about fifteen months of perfect married life, we were further blessed by the advent of a fine little boy.

“‘When our son was about four months old, Mr. Verndon was called to Nashville, he said, on some surveying business for the L. & N. Railroad. He thot he would return in about three weeks. “‘I’ll write every day if I can, little sweetheart,” he said as he kissed me good-bye. He only carried a hand-bag and a few changes of linen. He had no relatives in Nashville except a few distant cousins.’

“‘Excuse the interruption, madam,’ I said, ‘but where was the home town of your husband and his parents?’

“‘He said he was born in Newark, New Jersey,’ she replied, ‘but that his parents had been dead since his early youth—in fact, he scarcely remembered them.

“‘Well, after arriving in Nashville,’ continued my visitor, ‘he wrote me a short letter from the Maxwell House and that was the last I heard from him for fifteen months, when he returned one evening carrying a banjo, but no baggage whatever.

“‘As soon as I saw who it was at the door, I sprang forward to meet him with all the pent-up affection I still bore him. He held me at arms’ length, smiled at me in a peculiar way, and asked who lived there. “‘Why, La Salle, don’t you know me—your wife?’” I said, and I could not restrain the tears. He stood there looking at me incredulously, and stared at the house and furniture as tho he were in a strange place. Then the baby toddled in and clung to my skirts and looked at him in a scared way. When he saw it, his face grew clouded and wrinkled, and after looking at it a few seconds in a puzzled way, he broke into a loud and rather inco-

herent laugh and remarked with an incredulous chuckle: "Hum! Where did you get it?" Then he continued to stare at the baby, and little Rambert began to cry as he edged away from his father. "Why, La Salle," I said, "don't you know your own child—our little Rambert?" "I had an infant son about four months old when I went away two weeks ago," he replied, "but this is a child about two years old and can talk." Then he tried to pick the boy up in his arms, but the child just screamed so terribly that he desisted and tried to coax it to come to him. "My dear husband," I continued, "you've been gone a little more than fifteen months, and of course our boy has grown until you cannot recognize him. Why did you only write once in all this time? Where is your baggage, La Salle? Can you play the banjo?" Then he turned himself loose, and the way he could play the instrument was indeed a surprise, for I did not know he played the instrument at all. "Why, of course I can play it. How could I make a living if I could not play it?" and he gave me a look of scorn. "Have you given up your other professions?" I asked. "I never had any other professions that I know of," he replied. "What are you talking about anyway?" and another look of scorn and pity was bestowed on me. "That's some kid you have there—for a four-months-old," and he again turned his attention to our child. I began to realize that he was not acting and with it came the awful realization that something in his mind had slipped and his mental machinery was not functioning normally. And oh, Doctor, what an awful fear gripped my heart! "I'm going to train the little rascal to be a minstrel," said La Salle, "and then he can travel with me and help with my street concerts;" and he smiled happily. "Yes, that will be great," I said, for I realized it would be best to humor him and not cross him in any way. "Now you're talking, woman," he said, and he came up to me and affectionately put his arm around me and gave me an old-time caress that strangely touched my soul—and, yes, I was happy again. "Perhaps," thought I, "if I humor him and help him, his memory may return, and then everything will be all right again." "Aren't you hungry, dear?" I asked, for I noticed that he looked around as tho in search of food and drink. "Oh, no!" smiled he. "I played in a saloon down on the levee after I got off the boat this morning, and the boys just filled me up with drinks and all the eats I could hold, and then they took up a hat collection for me and it netted a little over six dollars." Then he looked very proud of his performance. I did not let him see my

chagrin. 'On the way up from New Orleans I played on the boat to entertain the passengers, and the captain said I was his guest and he would not accept a cent for fare nor board, and the passengers tipped me liberally, so I made several hundred on the trip;' and he looked profoundly satisfied. "I promised them down at the saloon, THE SEA SHELL, that I would come and play and sing for them this evening again," continued La Salle. "The boss promised me five dollars and the collection will amount to about fifteen dollars. Why should we worry?" and he smiled at himself complaisantly again. Then he played and sang some more and in this way won over Rambert, for the child is inordinately fond of music. This seemed to make him very happy, and he laid aside his banjo and proceeded to play with the child as tho he were a five-year-old himself. He seemed quite rational now, but his amnesia continued, and he had no recollection of ever being anything but a strolling musician.'

"'But he seemed to recognize you as his wife after a few minutes with you, did he not?' I asked the visitor.

"'Yes,' she replied; 'but he was not entirely satisfied with me, and the size of Rambert still puzzled him.

"'Then you have no way of knowing just how long he has had the idea of being a troubadour?' I asked her kindly.

"'None whatever, Doctor,' she replied. 'He went down to THE SEA SHELL that evening and played and sang there till nearly 11 o'clock p. m., when he came home and complained of being very tired and sleepy; I got him to take a cold bath and then we retired, and he fell into a sound sleep in a very few minutes. I could not sleep at all, I was so worried and nervous. After he was sleeping like a log, I got up and made a thoro search of his pockets, in hope of finding something or other that might throw some light on the case. He had a little more than thirty thousand dollars carefully sewed up in his clothing and about six hundred dollars loose in his pockets. Among the roll of big bills sewed up in the lining of his vest was the faded photo of a very beautiful girl, who appeared to be about nineteen years of age, and also this note:

"'“BATON ROUGE, LA., May 17, 18—.

"'“*Dear Ralph*,—I am so lonely since you went away. Please hurry back to us, won't you, dear? Luvele is so restless and nervous since her daddy went away. We both love you and await your

return. Please write often, and do be careful with yourself and not get hurt. If you can't find them, throw up the job and come home.

“Faithfully your own, VELCIE.”

“‘Some more mystery,’ I commented.

“‘Yes; but it seems almost certain from this note that he has another wife and has probably left her and forgotten that he is her husband and that his name is Ralph,’ said Mrs. Verndon, with a look of fear settling in her beautiful dusky eyes.

“‘No doubt about her being another wife and the child is evidently their daughter. It is a very rare case, madam, and is known as *memralj*,’ I said.

“‘*Memralj*,’ she mused. ‘That’s a new one on me, Doctor.’

“‘Yes, madam, it is a new one on all of us,’ I said, ‘for our medical records do not contain a case just like it.’

“‘But that is not all, Doctor,’ she continued.

“‘For heavens’ sake! is there more of it?’ I asked.

“‘Oh, yes! We are just getting fairly started, Doctor,’ she continued.

“‘Proceed, madam, proceed!’ I exclaimed.”

The Doctor was still a student in spite of his years, and ever ready to learn more.

“‘Well, the next morning he seemed more like himself,’ continued my visitor; ‘and when he saw his banjo on the piano where he laid it the previous evening when he came home, he picked it up and looked at it in a puzzled way and asked me whose it was. “Why, dear, it’s yours,” I replied, and slipped my arm thru his. “Won’t you please play for me while I’m getting breakfast? You know I’m so fond of the banjo,” I coaxed. “Mine!” he exclaimed in bewilderment. “Why, I never owned a banjo in my life and don’t know a thing about playing it.” “Then won’t you play on the piano and sing for me, La Salle?” I asked. “Oh, yes! I’ll do that,” he said. Then, to my utter astonishment, he seated himself at the piano and began to play the banjo pieces he had played the night before, and if one had not known he was performing on the piano, he would have thought he was playing the banjo, so wonderful was his imitation of the banjo. I asked him again to play some of the old songs he used to play for me, but he couldn’t remember any of them. When I placed one of them before him, he looked at it awhile and then played it with a great deal of feeling, but declared he could not sing. This puzzled me greatly, for he has a wonderful voice, and only the previous evening he played

and sang with the banjo. Then I went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast, and he soon stopped playing and wandered out in the yard. Everything seemed strange to him. Our next-door nabor came out after his morning paper and when he saw La Salle was home he greeted him cordially, but La Salle only stared stupidly at him and turned and came in and asked me who lived over there. I was so mortified, for the Faulkners are particular friends of ours and are so fond of La Salle. What to tell them and how to explain his condition was a ticklish job I assure you.'

"'I appreciate the delicacy of your position, madam,' I said, 'and sympathize with you deeply.'

"'Oh, thank you, Doctor!' she exclaimed. 'I surely need all the help and sympathy I can find.'

"Mrs. Verndon continued: "'Why did you act that way with Mr. Faulkner?" I asked. "I don't know the boob, and he acted rather fresh, I thot," he explained in an offended way. Then I went back to my task of preparing breakfast. Presently I missed him, and thot he had gone out doors again. I soon heard little Rambert laffing and cooing, and La Salle had the child in his arms and was trying to dress him. "I'm going to take the little rascal with me when I go down to THE SEA SHELL to-night, and the boys will give him some beer," he said. I was frightened now, for I realized that he would do just whatever struck his fancy. I did not dare to go out and leave him alone with the child, so I slipped out and asked Mr. Faulkner to hurry and bring my father over to our home. Then we ate our breakfast, and he seemed to come back to himself; but the banjo still troubled him. "Aren't you going down to THE SEA SHELL and play it to-day?" I asked. "'THE SEA SHELL'? What the devil is that?" and he looked at me in utter bewilderment. "That's the saloon where you played the banjo last night," I explained. He shook his head, and said I was trying to play a joke on him.

"'Soon after breakfast father and Mr. Faulkner came in, and La Salle greeted them warmly and had no recollection of just snubbing Mr. Faulkner. They had a long chat, and La Salle seemed entirely rational. I was so pleased, and believed that his mind was returning to its normal state.

"'After father left, I asked La Salle how much he made on his trip to Tennessee. "Very little above expenses and what I sent home to you," he replied. He had not sent any money to me. "How much money have you on hand now?" I asked, to see

if he remembered the large amount I found sewed up in his clothes. He felt thru his pockets and found the six hundred dollars I had put back there, but he seemed surprised to find it and could not account for it being there. He had no recollection of the other money.

“Everything went along nicely for about five months, and La Salle returned to engineering and surveying and was doing well, when one Saturday I was to meet him at his office at 1 o'clock, and we were to attend a matinee. I was on hand promptly, but La Salle was not there. His office was open, and I went in and sat down, thinking he had just stepped across the hall to some of the other offices. I waited an hour and then became uneasy, and began to make inquiries among the few other offices that were still occupied. Dr. Rankin had met him going down about 11 o'clock a. m., and that was all I could learn about him. I waited another hour and then left a note saying I had gone home and for him to hurry home. I waited all that evening, and then I gave up. I knew he'd had another fit of amnesia, and had wandered off to some of his other selves—perhaps had gone back to his Baton Rouge wife and dauter. I had a strange desire to see them; and after discussing the case fully with my parents, father and I decided to go to the Louisiana town and investigate.

“We took the first packet down the river, and in about three weeks we were in the quaint old French-American town of Baton Rouge. It is a city of trees and vines and dreamy ease. No one there is ever in a hurry. It is an ideal place to dream and love—and die. We went to the principal hotel, and after a day's rest we began a quiet search for anyone of La Salle's description with the name Ralph and whose wife's name was Velcie and whose dauter's name was Luvele—rather a meagre clue, but it was all we had and we intended to make the most of it.

““It seems to me, dauter,” said father, “that as La Salle's tastes are all toward the learned professions, we had better get a directory and commence with the professionals first.” This seemed a good plan, and we soon ran thru the lawyers and engineers and surveyors, but not one of them was named Ralph. Then we turned to the physicians, and after quite a search we found an obsolete doctor whose name was “Ralph Edgerton Holmes, 268 Magnolia Street.” After considerable time and many inquiries, we found that Magnolia was a short street away down in the southeast corner of the town. We finally got a conveyance, and after nearly an

hour we found the place and it was a neat little vine-clad cottage of four rooms. The yard and whole place was a wilderness of flowers. A young and very pretty woman about twenty years of age was reading on the veranda, and a rare and lovely little girl about thirteen months old was playing with a doll and a kitten near by. The door-plate bore a neat sign, "Dr. Ralph E. Holmes." "Beg pardon," hailed father "but is the doctor at home?" "N-o, he is out of the city," lazily returned the woman in a hesitating manner, as tho she did not know just what to say. "When do you expect him back?" I chipped in before father could ask another question. "Do you want to see him on professional business?" she countered. "Yes, and also on other business," father answered, with a kind and sympathetic look at her. "He's gone to Baltimore to take a post-graduate course and expects to be gone several months," she replied, and she looked from father to me with a look of fear on her sweet and innocent face. I was strangely attracted to her.

"The child held out its tiny hands toward father and cooed to be taken up. He picked up the pretty mite and began to coo to her and play with her. She was delighted and put her little hands around his neck and squeezed and loved him. This touched both of us deeply; and we knew from the child's looks that it was La Salle's—there could be no mistake about it.

"How to go about our mission without wounding the poor and faithful little soul was a problem. "I'm a relative of your husband's, madam, and I did not know till to-day that he was married and had a family," easily explained father. "Ralph was a little wild at college, and inclined to romances that he never shared with any of us, and I suppose this is one of them." "Oh, I'm so glad! then, if you are relatives, I can talk to you about him and perhaps you can help me to find him," she said, and she gave us both an appealing look. "Is Ralph really lost?" asked father. "I'm afraid so, sir, for he's been gone now about nine months and I have only heard from him once, and that was from Memphis at the Gayoso House. He went down town as usual one morning and that was the last I heard of him till he wrote me a brief note from Memphis saying he was going to Baltimore to take a special course in brain and nervous diseases. He complained of feeling bad, and said he had pains in his back and queer feelings in his head, but attributed it to the bad water and excessive heat in Memphis. I wrote him immediately and begged him to come home and give up his plans

till the weather was cooler. I never heard from him again, and did not know what to do. I hated to take strangers into my confidence, and thot it best to just wait till he came back." "Has your married life been happy?" I ventured. "Oh, yes, very!" she replied. "We love each other very dearly, and never had the remotest bit of trouble. He seemed so fond of me and baby, and never went to town without taking us with him. We selected this out-of-the-way place in order to have quiet and where we can be entirely alone." "Were you living here when Ralph found you?" asked father. "Oh, no! I'm from New Orleans, and he said he was from Baltimore. He had recently graduated from Johns Hopkins, he said; but he did not seem to care much for practice, and often pleaded another engagement when he did not want to go. He was very successful, and could have had a big practice if he had cared for it. He seemed to have plenty of money, and said he believed in living while it lasted."

"Does he play the piano much since he married you?" I ventured, for lack of something better to say. "The piano?" she asked. "Why, I never knew he could play it. I play it and also sing. He can certainly play the violin and the guitar, and sings well. Music is our principal diversion. Are you sure he can play the piano?" "Yes, I am sure," I said; "but I did not know that he played the violin and guitar."

"Have you a good picture of Ralph?" asked father. "To be sure I have," she said. "Luvele here is one, and here is the photo of him that we had taken together shortly after we were married." There could be no mistake in regard to his identity.

"Have you ever seen any of his relatives or heard him speak of them?" continued father. "N-o, I have never seen any of them," she said; "but he said his mother and two sisters lived in Baltimore and that he was going to take me to visit them when Luvele got about three years old. He never cared to talk about his past and I never bothered about it when I saw he did not care to discuss it with me. We were so happy I did not care for anything except the present and our own affairs."

"When were you and he married?" I asked. "Fifteen months ago, but it seems like many years ago," she replied.

"May I inquire if you are one of his sisters?" she asked me point blank. Father shot me a look of inquiry, but I thot it best to have it over with as soon as possible. I realized the blow would almost kill her, but it had to fall. "No, I am his *w-i-f-e*," I

replied, and I felt like an assassin. "I don't believe you!" she cried, and rose and staggered toward me. I held out my arms and she swooned into them and was soon unconscious. After about two hours we aroused her, and then I told her my story. She listened like one entranced, and a hopeless look was in her pretty lavender eyes. When I had finished, she buried her face in her hands and just moaned and sobbed as tho her soul were in awful travail.

" " " "Oh, my poor husband! My dear Ralph! What is to become of me and Luvele?" and she wrung her hands and moaned piteously. "There, there, dear; cheer up," I said. "We are all in the same boat and must drift along together, and try to find the poor soul and see if we can have his strange malady treated," I said in as calm a voice as I could muster—in fact, I was merely whistling to keep up my own flagging courage and to keep back my pressing tears.

" " " "Yes, my dear child, we must all pull together and try to comfort one another," said papa soothingly, and he gently put his arm around her shoulders and affectionately drew her to him.

" " " "Oh! I'm so glad you don't hate me, and it is so good of you all to help me in my sad hour of need," sobbed the distressed creature on papa's breast. "Why, of course, we don't blame you, dear," I said, "for you had no way of knowing that he was not all right, any more than we had of knowing that he was a victim of this strange amnesia or *memralj*." "*Memralj!*" exclaimed Mrs. Holmes, and a strange light gleamed in her tear-dimmed eyes. "Why, I heard Ralph discussing that mental disorder with Dr. Williams shortly after we were married, when Dr. Williams asked Ralph to consult with him about a strange mental case that was puzzling the physicians here. I heard him tell Dr. Williams that he was going back to Baltimore soon and take a special post-graduate course in mental and nervous ailments, and expected to gain some new light on that malady—whatever it was." "It is a mental disorder that the medical profession knows little or nothing about," explained papa. "The victim of it has a number of identities or selves, and when he passes from one identity he loses all recollection of his other identities, it seems. The best authorities regard it as due to some abnormal pre-natal influence that the mother impresses on her offspring," explained father as he led Mrs. Holmes to a seat near me, and again took up Luvele and began to toss her up in the air and play with her.

" " " "Velcie (*Mrs. Holmes' name*) came over and put her arms

around me and just seemed inconsolable. I returned her caresses, and we both cried a duet together, and then we pledged our friendship and co-operation. We agreed to share our sorrow with each other and work together in finding *our* husband. We did not think just then what we would do if we did find him. Our only thought was to find him and help him. It is strange, there was no jealousy on either side. We were sisters in trouble—the wives of a strange man who had forgotten both of us and his identity as our respective husbands, and had probably gone on to *yet another identity*. “Oh, heavens! Is it possible that he may have yet other identities?” moaned Velcie in despair. “Well, so far as the great alienists have any data, there has never been known a case that had more than *two* identities or *double souls*,” volunteered father. “If *two* identities are possible, I see no reason why a greater number may not occur,” coldly remarked Velcie, with a dreamy, far-away look of utter despair in her beautiful eyes. “True,” said I, “but let us hope that he only has two souls.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEIRD SEARCH FOR A DOUBLE SOUL.

“‘As **they** were all tired out and needed rest and time to think,’ continued my visitor, ‘Mr. Vangive (*my father*) told Velcie to bear up as best she could and go to bed early and get a good sleep and rest, and that we would come out again the next day and decide on some plan of procedure. To this she readily agreed, and urged us to come early, as she would be so lonely and anxious to do something for Ralph. Father and I both took her in our arms and assured her that she should not bear it all alone, and this greatly relieved her and she bade us good evening, and Luvele cooed to go with us. Father and I both had been captured by the child from the start, and I felt a strange liking for Velcie, instead of a feeling of jealousy, as most women would have felt.

“‘As soon as we were alone, papa exclaimed: “Isn’t she a fine little woman? We’ll take her home with us if she will go; and I’d just give anything to have her little girl and raise her,” and he sighed deeply. “Yes, papa,” I said, “we must persuade her to go with us and she shall be my sister, and we can raise little Luvele along with Rambert—and what pals those kids would be!” I exclaimed as a spirit of prophecy came over me.

“‘That evening papa and I talked it over from every possible angle, and decided that we must bend all our efforts to finding La

Salle and seeing if medical aid could do aught for him. If the doctors could do nothing for him, we must confine him in a sanitarium, where we could look after him and see that he received proper care. "But suppose, dauter," said papa, "that when we find him he is living under a third identity and has another wife and perhaps children by her?" "Well, that would be a stunner, papa," I replied; "but we won't cross that Bridge of Sighs till we come to it." "But suppose that when we find him he is Dr. Holmes again, and wants Velcie and Luvele and fails to recognize you and Rambert?" persisted father. "Well, in that case," I answered, "the only thing to do is to let him have them, and as long as he is Dr. Holmes I will stand quietly aside, and if he ever changes back to La Salle Vernon and recognizes me and Rambert, he will be mine as long as that identity lasts," said I, with a sense of humor for the first time. "Brave little woman! My own little Loree!" father exclaimed. "That would be a just and sensible way to act, and I think that Velcie will be equally fair and sensible; if she is, that will greatly facilitate matters—if we find him; but it is best to catch your bird before you discuss the best way to cook it;" and papa luffed in his old way.

"We both arose early the next morning, and after partaking of a light breakfast and some extra strong coffee, we set out for the Holmes bungalow, and found Velcie and Luvele out on the veranda, looking for us. She was dressed in a very becoming and simple morning dress of soft gray, trimmed with a touch of a soft and whispering shade of red that was very becoming to her dark and dusky beauty. Little Luvele was all dolled up in white and looked like a real little fairy.

" " "Good morning, dauter," exclaimed papa. "Good morning, sister," I exclaimed at the same time. "Good morning, father and sister, my good friends and now kinfolks," said Velcie. We caressed her affectionately; and as soon as Luvele saw us she ran to papa and held up her pretty baby hands and smiled and cooed to be taken up and tossed in the air again, as he had done the day before. Papa needed no urging, and soon had the child in his arms and was loving the little elf and playing with her.

" "While papa played with Luvele, I told Velcie that we had considered the case from every angle, and had decided on our course of action, if she liked the plan. She agreed, and was delighted to go with us and help find him; she also agreed that if he ever went back to his identity as Dr. Holmes, she would receive him as her

husband and stick to him as long as that identity lasted, and if he changed to his identity as La Salle Verndon, he was to be mine as long as it lasted. "But suppose," she reflected "that when we find him he is living another identity and has a wife and child under that identity—then what?" and a great fear seemed to grip her very soul with icy fingers. "I suggested the same thing to papa, but he thot it useless to cross a bridge that we may never come to," I explained as hopefully as I could. "Well, I suppose, in the event that he has a third wife, we shall have to let her have him as long as he is under that identity, and then if he comes back to either of us, we'll have him;" and Velcie actually smiled as the grim humor of the situation dawned on her. "I confess that I see no other way," I hastened to agree with her. Papa also took the same view, so that phase of the problem was settled.'

ABOARD THE *WHIPPOORWILL*.

" 'After we had spent the most of the forenoon discussing the case, we all discovered that mortals have to eat, even if they do have magnus troubles; so Velcie and I fell to and prepared an appetizing little dinner, while papa acted as nurse and playmate for Luvele; and the way the little elf did laugh and scream with delight touched all our hearts and caused a feeling of kinship to pervade our souls. "It would break papa's heart to give up your little girl," I remarked as we both looked out of the window and saw them playing like two kittens with a ball of colored yarn. "Oh! I'm so glad you all like her and—" exclaimed Velcie. "Yes, and *you*," I hastened to assure her as I took her in my arms and gave her a squeeze that needed no postscript.

" 'We soon had an excellent dinner ready, and I soon discovered that my new sister was no mean cook, and as a hostess she was superb and adorable. Her manner was refined and cultured, with a quiet and kindly dignity gracing every movement and gesture; besides, she was a finished musician and had a wonderful voice and many other accomplishments—in fact, we were charmed with her and delighted that she was going North with us. She had never been out of the Southland, and had a most delightful Southern brogue that was both pleasing and fascinating. She was French, Italian, and Scotch, and inherited the best traits of all three races, and added a peculiar charm all her own—an original something in the way of a personality that one never meets but once. Her maiden name was Miss Velcie Langwild, and she was a graduate in

music and art, and had a knack of being versatile and adaptable to a high degree. Her father was Captain Ferdinand Langwild, an old river captain, and he had won distinguished honors in the Civil War as a military leader and strategist. Velcie came from the best of stock, and, like all thorobreds, showed her breeding in every movement.

“ ‘Velcie arranged with a near-by nabor to look after her chickens, garden, and house while she was away, and merely told her nabors that she was called away for awhile on account of an accident that had befallen her husband. Her guests, she explained, were his relatives. She was too proud to let the truth leak out.

“ ‘She soon arranged her affairs, and drew two thousand dollars out of the bank for current expenses. Papa objected to this, for he had large means and a big income that was increasing every year, and he insisted that she was our guest and *protégée* now and that he would meet all the expenses; but her old family pride would not hear to such an arrangement at all, so we had to let her have her way to this extent; in all other respects she submitted to our plans and suggestions like a child.

“ ‘The arrangements were soon completed, and we learned at the hotel that the *Whippoorwill*, one of the niftiest little boats that plied the lower river, was scheduled to go up to St. Louis that evening about 7 o’clock. The three of us took supper at the hostelry and had just finished when we heard the whistle of our boat. We were among the first to walk her gangplank, and had booked passage to Memphis, where we decided to make our first stand, and see if we could pick up a clue in that sun-baked city of dirt and indolence. As Ralph had written to his wife from the Gayoso, we thot it possible that we might pick up some clues at the hotel or about town. It was about 10 o’clock at night when we reached Memphis, and we were carried directly to the hotel, and waited until the next morning before making any inquiries.

“ ‘Papa adroitly pumped the clerk and porters and bell-hops and described La Salle to them, but they could not recall such a person; and the same in our search about town—no one remembered him. He had probably only passed thru Memphis and at once departed.

“ ‘The *Water Queen* would be the next up-river boat and would pass Memphis about 4 o’clock that afternoon. A good bill was running at the principal theater, and we decided to pass the time and enjoy the play while we were waiting for the boat. A stock

company was the attraction, and the play was a vivid melodrama, in which a husband left his wife for an affinity and then returned to steal his child from its mother.

“““Sister Loree,” said Velcie, “I do believe that little blonde actress is staring at Luvele.” “It is strange, but I was just going to call your attention to the same thing,” I replied; “but Luvele is such a remarkable child she attracts unusual attention everywhere.” “But I have a feeling that there is something more than curiosity about a beautiful child in her continual staring at Luvele and watching all of us,” replied Velcie, and she seemed strangely agitated and excited, and her eyes seemed to take on another color, and her manner was decidedly uncanny. “Never mind, dear,” I soothed; “it may only be a fancy on our part after all. Stage people have to look at their audience, and she may have chanced to look at us in particular instead of at the audience in general.”

““Just then an usher came to our box and said that Mlle. Le Grande desired to have a talk with us and for us to bring the child with us and to come direct to her dressing-room. “What shall we do, papa?” gasped I in a voice of nervous trepidation. “Why, go and see what the lady has on her mind, by all means,” urged papa. “Just follow me, ladies,” said the usher, “and I’ll show you to Mlle. Le Grande’s dressing-room.” We followed the usher and were soon shown into the dressing-room and courteously and kindly received by the young actress.

“““Excuse my presumption, ladies,” said Mlle. Le Grande, “but I just had to see you on account of the little one here,” and she indicated Luvele and took the child in her arms before we could offer a protest. “Bless its little heart!” she went on in raptures over the child, “but it is just the living image of Jack, so I knew it must be his child, and I just had to find out and learn who you all are and where you are from,” ran on the girl, as tho she were addressing the walls of the room instead of us. “Who is *Jack*?” asked Velcie in her quiet and dignified way, but I could see that her nerves were ready to snap with the mental strain. “Oh, yes!” replied Mlle. Le Grande; “he’s the leading man in the Southern Stock Company that is now playing in St. Louis and a very clever actor and something of a genius at music. He just seems naturally to know all instruments, and has a voice that simply hypnotizes his auditors. I was a member of the same company for two years and played with Jack Curtis for a little more than four months, when I came here to take the place of a girl who recently died. The

same people own this company and the one in the Mound City. We sometimes thot Jack a little queer, but just attributed it to genius and let it go at that. But his little girl, *Ulda*, is the living image of him, and when I saw this beautiful little mite—a replica of Jack Curtis—I sure did stare, for I never saw two humans so exactly alike, only *Ulda* is about seven years old.” Then she paused for breath, and Velcie asked: “Doesn’t *Ulda* resemble her mother any?” I saw her drift, and kept discreetly quiet. “Not in the least,” replied Mlle. Le Grande. “His poor wife worshiped him, and they were very devoted to one another, and when she died he was inconsolable and seemed to be gradually changing into another man. The first we noticed was the fact that he would not touch any of the instruments he used to play so divinely. He moped around for three days, and simply walked and blundered thru his parts, and then he suddenly disappeared. We feared he had killed himself in a fit of despondency over the loss of *Zurane*, his beautiful and talented wife. Her stage name was *Zurane Lambert*, and she was born in Berne, Switzerland. The case was put in the hands of the police, and the company employed detectives and advertised in the metropolitan and theatrical papers, but we could never find any trace of him. About six months ago he came to the stage door of the theater and strolled in and began to look around among the dressing-rooms; I happened to meet him, and he at once recognized me and inquired about the other members of the cast. I told him we had all new people except three of the old ones, but our manager, Mr. Joe Lively, was still at the helm. The strange part of it was the fact that he recognized all of us except Joe and he and Joe used to be real pals and cronies. Joe tapped his forehead significantly, and we said no more about it. Another strange change had come over him—he now would only play the harp and mandolin—declaring he never played any other instruments. When playing the harp he would sometimes sing, and at other times he would whistle, but he was so expert at whatever he did in the music line we were glad to let him do just whatever pleased him. We all felt that his mind was a little affected, but his acting was just as before—only better and more weird and uncanny. Everything he did made a big hit; and when he gave musical selections between acts he would be encored and called back until the management would not let him respond any more for fear he might have a nervous breakdown.”

“““What became of *Ulda* when he disappeared and did not re-

turn for several years?" I asked. "Oh! the whole company just kind of adopted the sweet little thing, for we were all crazy about her, and she was a genius and a mascot and a decided hit. She lived around with the ladies of the company," continued Mlle. Le Grande, "and was welcome everywhere, and she soon got to playing child parts, and developed such remarkable talent we were all mighty proud of her. Many wealthy people came to us and begged to be allowed to adopt the child, but we wouldn't part with her for all the world; and *Ulda* seemed to be born for the histrionic art and the nomadic life, so she just grew into our hearts and became the soul of the company. We all chipped in and employed a private teacher who came and gave her lessons every day except Saturdays and Sundays. The little elf just learned intuitively so fast her teacher could not keep up with her. When Jack came back to us the child remembered him and was simply delighted, but he seemed greatly puzzled about her size and the changes that time had wrought in her." I gave Velcie a knowing look and she understood—that was just the way he acted about Rambert when he came back to us.

" " "May I inquire if you are relatives of Jack's?" asked Mlle. Le Grande. "Yes; I'm his sister-in-law," said Velcie, "and this is his half-sister," indicating me. "I married his twin brother; and we are all so fond of Jack I suppose I unconsciously marked my child." "Oh, how nice it will be! and I just know he will be delighted to see you all," said Mlle. Le Grande. "It is strange, tho, that he never talked about his relatives." "He's been to see us while he was away from you all, but he never breathed a word about being married and having a living daughter," continued Velcie in an easy and indifferent way.

" " "Are you all on your way to St. Louis to see Jack?" asked Mlle. Le Grande. "N-o; we are just returning to Louisville from the Mardi-Gras at New Orleans, and we wrote to Jack to come and spend his vacation with us when the theaters close for the summer," went on my talented and diplomatic sister, as tho she were a born diplomat at the Court of Ananias. I was really proud of her; and papa agreed it was a wise precaution to not let Mlle. Le Grande know of our real plans. We feared that she might wire him that we were coming, and we had no way of knowing what effect such news might have on him.

The announcer or caller was summoning the actors to their parts and our hostess had to respond to her cue, so we hurriedly bade her

good-bye, and went back to our seats. We consulted our watches and saw that we could not stay to the end of the performance or we might miss our boat. We quietly left at the close of the second act and went to the hotel, paid our score, and repaired directly to the wharf.

“We had only about ten minutes to wait when the majestic and gaily bedecked *Water Queen* poked her prow toward the wharf and soon was discharging her passengers and cargo. In about fifteen minutes she showed Memphis a clean pair of heels and was dreaming and chugging her way up the great river of America.

“We booked passage thru to St. Louis, for we had unexpectedly found our game, and a great feeling of relief came over us all; and we soon acquainted papa with our interview with the actress.

““Wasn’t it a lucky thing we all decided to attend that theater?” mused papa, more to himself than to us. “But, my children, what will we do when we get to St. Louis and confront him if he has no recollection of us or that part of his past connected with us?” And we all three sighed sadly and knew not what to suggest. “It would sure break my heart to look into his dear eyes and have them regard me as a stranger,” sighed Velcie, and her eyes took on a wild and uncanny gleam. “Tut, tut, dear! you must not be so sentimental in a case like this, but must bear it philosophically and stoically, like a physician does when it is necessary for him to operate on a member of his family. All feelings of sentiment would be out of place and might do harm,” continued father in a kindly way to Velcie. “I suppose you are right, Father Vangive,” said Velcie; “but it will be an awful strain on my mind and nerves to meet him face to face and have him just stare at me like a stranger. However, I’ll be as brave as I can and do all I can to help him in his sad affliction.” “That’s the way to talk, my brave little girl,” said father. “We’ll all do the best we can, and it all depends on what particular identity is controlling his mind when we meet him. But as he has returned to them and *Ulda*, and seems content there with them, and believes himself an actor, I don’t see what we can do. We might have him adjudged *insane* and locked up in an asylum, but what good would that do him or us? And such a course would deprive *Ulda* of his love and care and would only disgrace all of us.” “But, papa, could we prove that he is *insane*?” I asked. “He seems perfectly rational in each identity, and merely a loss of memory of certain events in his past would hardly constitute *insanity*, it seems to me.” “And of course the great alienists would

split up over the case and absolutely disagree on whether certain phases of amnesia constituted *insanity*," declared Velcie positively. "Besides, I would rather see him dead or lose him entirely than to have such a disgrace as having sent him to an asylum. To me it is unthinkable!" and the poor loyal little soul shuddered as tho she were being plunged in a deep well of ice water. "And I agree with you, Sister Velcie," I said. "I, too, should prefer to give him up forever rather than have him disgraced by placing him in an asylum. The saint would ever cling to our children and it is our duty to spare them such a fate." Velcie then threw her arms around me and we cried down each other's backs and sobbed in silence for awhile, and when we looked up papa was trying hard to swallow something that seemed bent on sticking in his throat, and dabbing at his eyes with his handkerchief.

" " "I'll bet we will all fall in love with *Ulda*," suggested papa tentatively, for want of something better to say. "If she's a replica of Luvele, as Mlle. Le Grande said, how could I help loving the poor little motherless thing," said Velcie, and her velvet eyes grew moist and reminiscent. "Of course I shall love her too," said I, "for any child like Luvele will have no trouble finding the door to my heart." Velcie gave me a look that was a whole dictionary, and just then papa came in with Luvele in his arms and announced that supper was called.

" " "We all went directly to the dining-room, and Captain Lanning introduced us to his other guests and assigned us places on each side of the table and next to his station at the head of the table. We all recognized this as a special honor he had bestowed on us and felt duly grateful. The Captain was an old hand at the river business and a born diplomat and pleasant conversationalist, so we were soon pleasantly engaged in lively conversation with the other guests, and there was much polite badinage and good-fellowship prevailed.

" " "The Captain was pleased with us I could see, and after supper he invited us up to the bridge with him. The evening was a fine one in early May, and the river was as placid as a tangled summer dream.

" " "Ah!" sighed the Captain. "I wish I had that chap with me who came up from New Orleans as far as Cairo some time ago. He was certainly a genius when it came to playing the banjo and piano and singing and imitating sounds and voices;" and the good man sighed ruefully. "I offered him every inducement to just

travel up and down with me and entertain my guests, but he seemed to have something weighing heavily on his mind, and left me at Cairo. He said he was going to Cincinnati. That was the first and last I ever saw him; and he was an educated chap, too, I'm tellin' o' ye all." "What kind of a looking man was he?" asked father casually, altho we all knew who it was. His description left no room for doubt. "By the way, madam," said the Captain, "your little one there looks enuff like him to be his own child," and he looked at Luvele, who was playing between Velcie and me. "I have been told before that she resembles other persons," laughed Velcie easily; "in fact, I suppose that everyone has a few doubles." "Yes, I suppose so," meditated the Captain; "but I never saw such a remarkable resemblance in all my life as exists between your daughter and my late guest and friend, Dick—n-o, not Dick, but Jack—Jack *Curtis*, he said his name was, and a most likable chap he was, too." As we made no further reply to his reminiscences of his late friend, the Captain easily changed the subject in reply to a question from papa.

"The trip up to St. Louis was a delightful one and we all enjoyed it and the perfect weather. The second night we tied up at the wharf in the city of St. Louis, but as it was late and the boat would tie up there till the following afternoon, the Captain told us we might remain on board that night, and thus save ourselves a hotel bill. We accepted his kind invitation and also took breakfast aboard the *Water Queen*.

"Then we went to the Southern Hotel and registered and secured good rooms; then we strolled about town, and Velcie and I did some shopping till luncheon-time. We soon located the theater where "Jack" was the leading man. We bought tickets and located ourselves in a lower left-hand box. We had decided to attend and see the performance and study him closely, and incidentally see if he would recognize any of us."

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE OLYMPIC.

"We were on hand in good time, and I confess that our nerves were on the *qui vive* and ready to snap asunder," continued my visitor; "however, we all controlled ourselves quite well, and it seemed like a holiday party out for a good time."

"The play was "A Woman's Faith," one of those old-fashioned dramas that lay bare human life and depict human nature

in many of its freak phases. The wife was true and loyal and so was her husband, but a wealthy suitor whom she had declined to marry was bent on an ignoble revenge, so he, with the help and connivance of some of his friends, cooked up a very strong case against the husband, and tried hard to destroy her faith in the loyalty of her husband. A young woman was secured by the plotters and she borrowed her sister's baby and posed it as her own and the husband's illegitimate offspring. The plot was a really clever one and carefully carried out, and would have succeeded only the wife's faith and trust in the integrity of her husband stood like a Gibraltar against all the lies his enemies were concocting and circulating. The husband was arrested and sent to prison, but in the last act the plotters failed to make good, because the girl who played the discarded mother was so touched by the baby fingers about her face and neck as she came into court to swear falsely against an innocent man that she got cold feet and broke down and confessed the whole affair before the court. So the wife was amply justified and rewarded by her unshaken faith in the goodness and innocence of her husband. It was a very touching drama and full of human interest, and there were not many dry eyes in the audience at the finale when the husband and wife were united.

"This thrilling emotional drama was well calculated to test the enduring qualities of our nerves to the utmost limit, and how Velcie and I ever lived thru it with our husband playing the leading role of the persecuted but faithful husband is still a mystery to us all.

"The first act was the wedding scene between Jack and Edith, and when they stood at the altar responding to the marriage service, and he slipped the ring on her finger, I thot I would have to scream or go mad. Velcie was stronger than I, or a better actress, for she saw the danger of my exploding and gripped my hand just in time. If it hadn't been for papa and Velcie, I surely would have fainted and caused a scene, and a scene was the last thing we wanted. And as the curtain went down on the last act, Velcie grasped my hand and murmured: "Oh, what an actor he is! what a genius!" Then she just sobbed and moaned as tho her soul were saying "good-bye" to her forever.

"Between the first and second acts *Ulda* came on and did a song and weird fancy dance, and oh, what a little genius she was! The vast audience just went wild over the child and encored and applauded until the house physician came out and announced that

the child had to be limited in the amount of work she did for fear of a nervous breakdown. And oh, the resemblance to her father and to Luvele! I never saw such a remarkable resemblance between two children, even in the case of twins. When the sweet little fairy tripped out in her snowy white garments and just seemed to float about like a great butterfly, papa and I both had to grip Velcie and prevent her from screaming and jumping out on the stage and capturing the child so great was her agitation. "Did you ever see anything like it?" she exclaimed in a wild frenzy. "There is positively something uncanny about it!" and we had to pacify her and cling to her, for we knew not just what she might attempt.

"We all remained in our box for awhile, and agreed that we were not strong and self-possessed enough to try to interview La Salle just then. We must have time to think—and plan; so we quietly went for a ride to Forest Park to cool our nerves and to think.

" "Oh! what shall we do?" exclaimed Velcie as soon as we were seated on a rustic bench near the Cave of the Winds. "Search me," laconically sighed father, and descending to the use of slang for the first time. "Why, papa!" I exclaimed reprovingly. "Beg pardon, my children," he said, "but I am so dumfounded and exhausted I did not think of my language." "And to think that he never recognized any of us!" exclaimed Velcie. "I caught his eye a number of times and tried to smile at him, but his face was like a block of marble—gave no sign of recognition." She looked away into the Great Nothingness and sighed resignedly.

" "And *Ulda!*" sighed papa more to himself than to us. "I just knew she would be wonderful. How I should like to have her!" and his head drooped in a deep reverie. "And so would we all," I added. "What a remarkable child, and such a genius!" I continued to myself. "And I'm going to have her!" positively declared Velcie, and there was a strange light in her eyes—a look that was positively uncanny. "Why, my dear," cooed papa as he gently took her hand and tried to soothe her, "how on earth could you get the girl? and you would not be allowed to keep her if you did get possession of her." "I don't care; I'm going to abduct the girl, and then we may be able to lure him to us;" and her eyes took on a new light—a look of hope and faith. "My dear sister," I said, "I'm afraid the plan would end disastrously for us all. I think we had better all try to see him first and have a talk with

him alone, and then if he doesn't recognize any of us—well, I really don't know what to do.” “That is true” replied Velcie; “but if Jack failed to recognize us while we were in the box to-day, I am afraid it would be the same if we were alone with him. My idea is to get Ulda and Luvele together and call his attention to the wonderful resemblance between them and see if that won't revive his memory as Dr. Holmes,” declared Velcie quite hopefully. “That might be a good plan,” admitted father rather dubiously. “But how are we going to bring the children together except back on the stage? and we don't want the actors to catch on and suspect anything,” continued father doubtfully. “We might invite him and Ulda to dine with us after the matinee Saturday, and merely state that some old friends from Cincinnati want to pay their respects and homage to him and his talented little daughter, and that we have a pleasant surprise in store for them. We can have our carriage at the stage door and carry them directly to our hotel, and we can have a private dining-room for the dinner, and thus be all alone,” explained papa. “I'm heartily in favor of that plan!” exclaimed Velcie; “and if he fails to recognize us, we will be acquainted with him and his daughter, and that will enable us to visit with them and see more of them than we otherwise could. I particularly want to cultivate Ulda and bring her and Luvele together all we can. I just feel that something will come out of it;” and a new hope lighted up her face and she was radiantly beautiful.

““This is Thursday,” mused papa, “and we will go back to the hotel now and write the invitation and send it to him in his dressing-room to-night. They have the same bill to-night, but we can go by there and send the note to him by one of the ushers, and then we can go on and attend another theater.” “Very well,” said Velcie and I at the same time. The invitation was sent in, and the next day about noon we received a polite note and an acceptance of our invitation.

“““But I can't imagine who you all can be,” said La Salle in the note. “I have been in Cincinnati a number of times, but never lived there. However, I am always pleased to be remembered by old friends; and we will be on hand as soon after the matinee as we can dress and be ready. Sincerely yours, JACK CURTIS.”

“““Well, wouldn't that get you!” exclaimed papa, with more energy than politeness; but I was too excited to call him on the carpet on account of his language.

“ “ “And he never lived in Cincinnati,” quoted Velcie, with a look of sympathy toward me. “It do beat the Dutch,” continued the girl, and this was the first time she ever used slang—even in a quotation.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DINNER AT THE SOUTHERN HOTEL.

“ “ “On the next day at about 4:40 p. m.,’ continued my visitor, ‘papa met Mr. Curtis and his dauter near the stage entrance of the Olympic Theater, but Jack did not show any signs of recognition when they met.

“ “ “Ah! Mr. Curtis, I’m glad to meet you again, but I guess you have forgotten me,” exclaimed papa as he grasped Jack’s hand. The two men greeted each other pleasantly, and then Curtis said: “Mr. Vangive, meet Miss Ulda Curtis, my only child.” “I am delighted to meet such a very charming and talented young lady,” greeted papa pleasantly, and he clasped the child’s timid hand and said a few polite and pleasant greetings to her. He had difficulty in restraining himself from clasping the child in his arms, she was so sweet and beautiful and modest and timid, notwithstanding her stage bringing-up.

“ “ “Has monsieur lived in Cincinnati long?” politely inquired Curtis in perfect French. “*Oui, monsieur*, most of my life; but our family comes originally from Baltimore;” and papa watched the effect of this shot closely, but it utterly failed to land. “I’m a Johns Hopkins man and took my degree there in medicine more than twenty-five years ago.” Still no effect. “But I don’t suppose you know anything about doctors and medical matters,” continued father, in hopes of reviving his memory as Dr. Holmes. “Not much, I must confess, as I’m seldom sick and have no need for the craft.”

“ “ “Papa changed the subject and carelessly asked: “How old is your dauter, Mr. Curtis?” “Ulda has just celebrated her eighth birthday,” proudly admitted Jack, “and some folks think she has a great future.” “I never had the pleasure of seeing her on the stage but once, but I would bet my last dollar that she reaches the top before she reaches her majority,” exclaimed father warmly and with a look of admiration in his eyes. “Oh, thank you, sir!” exclaimed Jack, and he warmly grasped father’s hand and wrung it ardently. “You’re so kind, señor,” modestly bowed Ulda, and she laid her soft white hand on papa’s hand and smiled sweetly in

his face. She instinctively liked and trusted papa, and before they reached the hotel the two were *bon camerades*. This greatly pleased papa and Mr. Curtis also liked it.

“Papa first brot them to our private sitting-room and presented them in a formal way. “Mr. Curtis, meet my dauter, Mrs. La Salle Verndon, and my *dauter-in-law*, Mrs. Ralph Holmes,” said papa. “Delighted to meet you, ladies, and am pleased to be your guest,” said Mr. Curtis. “But I was under the impression that I was to meet some old friends and be treated to a surprise,” he continued, looking first at one of us and then at the other. Then he spied Luvele, who had been timidly hiding behind her mother. “Oh, madam, what a very beautiful child you have!” he exclaimed in French, and before we could utter a word he had Luvele in his arms and was tossing her up and cooing to her just like papa does, and the little witch just cooed and squeezed her pretty arms around his neck and screamed with delight. “And oh, how strangely she is like my Ulda!” he said. Then he held her off at arms’ length and closely scrutinized her, but gave no sign of recognition. I feared poor Velcie would faint, so tense was the situation, and father and I had to support her to a chair. “Bless its little heart!” he continued, as tho we were not present. “Come here, Ulda,” he said, “and see what papa has found—she looks enuff like you to be your twin sister—and isn’t she the sweetest little dear you ever saw?” “Oh, papa, I want her!” exclaimed Ulda. “I would be so happy if I had a little sister like she is!” and Ulda took Luvele in her arms and squeezed and loved her and tossed her up and cooed to her while we all looked on entranced. “How old is the child?” suddenly asked Jack, and he looked Velcie straight and steadily in the eyes, but only with the polite interest of a stranger. No light of recognition. Then he carelessly scanned me, and then he turned and looked papa over indifferently. “She is about twenty-two months old, monsieur,” returned Velcie casually; and then she took Ulda in her arms and exclaimed: “But, monsieur, how are we to account for the wonderful likeness between our children—when they are not *related* in any way?” and she laid her hand on his arm and looked him steadily in the eyes. How she ever controlled herself I don’t know. “It is a puzzle, madam,” he returned carelessly in French, and then turned again and took Luvele from Ulda’s arms and proceeded to love her and coo to the little mite, and oh, how she did enjoy it! “Luvele dear, you must come to mamma now,” said Velcie; “you will make Mr.—er—Cur-

tis tired,” and she reached up to Jack’s arms for Luvele; but the little witch just put her arms around his neck and held on and just screamed with joy. “Oh, no! Mrs. Holmes,” replied Jack, “she is not tiring me in the least, I assure you. I never tire of children. I’m so sorry I have no little sister or brother for Ulda; but *Zurane* (*my late wife*) died suddenly as the result of a fall she received in the theater when Ulda was about three years old, and I have never considered marriage again—in fact, it is hard to get over the loss of a loved one;” and he actually wiped away some intruding tears and tried bravely to swallow something in his throat.

“How Velcie and I ever controlled ourselves and **did** not faint or scream I do not know. Of one thing we are all certain—the man was not acting—he was sincere. I noticed papa dabbing at his eyes, too. It was a dramatic moment, and we all felt the tension.

““I must remind you all that our dinner is probably getting cold, and if you haven’t lost your appetites, I suggest that we adjourn to the dining-room,” said papa, and we all looked at him in a relieved way. He had very delicately saved the day, for none of us knew what might happen next.

“Jack bowed low and courteously, and carried Luvele in his right arm and politely offered his left arm to *Velcie*; father and I brot up the rear with Ulda between us, and she had an arm twined around each of us and we had our arms about her—it was some procession, I assure you.

““I never took my eyes off Velcie for an instant, for she was so wrot up and her nervous tension was so great that I feared she would go mad or faint any minute. How she ever lived thru it I do not know—and neither does she.

““When we reached the table Velcie wanted to take Luvele, but Jack would not hear to it; he insisted on holding her on his lap and feeding her and playing with her. His soul was a hungry one, and he would not be denied. This strangely touched and pleased Velcie and her face was a color study all right enuff. “The child has taken a strange liking to you, Mr. Curtis,” observed Velcie, and again she faced him with both of her beautiful eyes living interrogation points. “Yes; it is a bit strange and touching,” he said; “but children have always liked me. I presume it is because I am so fond of them and always play with them when I can;” and he luffed pleasantly, but so indifferently. “Was your wife equally fond of them?” I ventured, more as a means of keeping up the conversation than because I cared to know. “Oh my,

yes!" he replied. "She was just crazy about them—spent most of her income endowing and supporting children's homes, etc."

"Excuse the question, Mr. Curtis, but was your wife in the profession too?" and Velcie faced him again; but no results. "Oh, yes!" he replied. "She was an actress when we married—practically born in the business. By the way, Mrs.—er—Holmes, were you ever on the stage?" "N-o, not exactly, but I have often thot of trying my hand at it;" and again she looked straight into his soul—and beyond; but all was blank. Papa and I were puzzled at this strange reply of hers, for we had never heard her even hint at such a thing. Perhaps, however, she was grinding an *axe* and politely getting Mr. Curtis to rotate the emery wheel for her; so we did not show any surprise nor interrupt. "I really believe you have decided talent, Mrs.—er—Holmes," and he looked her over critically and with the quick and sure eye of a connoisseur. "Oh! wouldn't that be grand if I had? for now that I am alone in the world and have a child to support, I might find an easy and pleasant way of earning a livelihood on the stage;" and she actually was enthusiastic and beamed on him. "Well, if you would really like to try, I should be pleased to coach you and give you a chance," he said. "We are really short a couple of people now, since some of them went to Memphis. Mlle. Le Grande, our character woman, recently went to Memphis to take the place of a girl who died there and we haven't been able to fill her place satisfactorily. I will speak to Joe—Mr. Lively, our manager, and I feel sure we can develop you. I will speak to him to-morrow; and we have a rehearsal every Monday afternoon between 2 and 4.30 o'clock. Of course, you will be at our opening to-morrow matinee at 2 o'clock?" "Why, y-e-s, I reckon so?" Velcie replied, and she looked at papa and me for an answer. "To be sure we will, Mr. Curtis, for we see you have an excellent company, and we are all fond of the theater anyway, so we will be there promptly," said father, as tho he had an extra ace or two up his sleeve.

"The meal was soon finished and we all voted it a success, and we felt that the actor left considering us his friends. He offered us complimentaries to the theater, but we declined, as we did not want to attract so much attention and be known as his friends; besides, we had ample means to pay our way, and would thus feel more independent; he was evidently surprised at our refusal to accept such a courtesy, and considered us very superior mortals. We returned him to the theater, and then went for a quiet drive about the

boulevards. As soon as we were alone, father broke forth with:

“ “ “Well, dauter mine, what on earth have you up your sleeve in wanting to try the histrionic art?” and he looked searchingly at Velcie. “Yes, Father Vangive,” she replied, “I have an axe that needs a few turns on the stone, and I’ e decided to let Mr. Curtis have the job of turning the crank;” and she smiled softly unto herself. “Well, what is the big idea, sister mine?” said I curiously. “Well, I think that by being with him a great deal and letting him see Luvele constantly it may revive his Dr. Holmes identity;” and she sighed hopefully. “Perhaps so,” admitted father, doubtfully. “Well, as we have no other plans at present, it won’t do any harm to try it,” I said resignedly. So we decided to let Velcie try the footlights for awhile, and when we met Jack at the matinee the next day we so informed him, and he seemed delighted and felt sure of her success. It was arranged for us to bring her to the rehearsal Monday afternoon.’

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW STAR.

“ “ “We were in our box early Sunday afternoon, and I never beheld such radiant beauty and transcendent happiness as Velcie’s face showed,” said my visitor. ‘It seemed positively weird and uncanny at times, and I saw that she had difficulty in keeping her overwrot nerves in leash; but the girl had a mind of her own, and was capable of scaling mental heights of which we did not dream. Jack must have been watching for us, for he came to our box twenty minutes before it was curtain-time, and we all greeted him cordially, and he seemed quite radiant with a new happiness that had taken complete possession of him.

“ “ “I’m so glad you all came early,” said Jack, “for I wanted to have a few words with Mrs.—er—Holmes before we begin. We will present the same bill all week, and you’re to play the part of Lady Arlington, the wronged but faithful wife, and you can get the hang of the part fairly well by watching it closely to-day. The lady who plays the part to-day is only a woman we secured for to-day, but we think she can play it fairly well. It is quite an emotional role and if you can work up to the spirit of it and color it with the real soul-colors, you can be our leading lady, and there will be no trouble about the salary.” “I’m so glad you came to explain it to me,” blushed Velcie happily, “for I have set my heart on winning the highest honors in my new profession,” and she con-

tinued to blush like a school-girl entangled in her first love-affair.

“ “ “Here are your lines, Mrs.—er—Holmes,” said Jack, “and I want you to learn them so there will be no hitch. By the way, what is your Christian name?” he inquired. “It is *Velcie*, and I would so much rather that you use it instead of the formality of ‘Mrs. Holmes’ every time;” and she blushed the whole gamut of colors—and a few new ones all her very own. “Thank you, *Velcie*,” returned Jack. “You have a very pretty name, and it won’t be necessary to give you a stage name—*Velcie Holmes* will be all right for a stage name and it has a soft Southern sound that I like.” “Oh! thank you, Mr.—er—Curtis—but may I not call you *Jack*?” asked Velcie. “To be sure you may and I shall esteem it a personal favor;” and he slyly reached over and squeezed her hand, which made the blushes flow like the soft and shimmering moonlight on the Elbe River in September. I nudged father, but he was too amazed to speak and just stared. “I’ll come again after the second act and see how you feel about it,” he said, and he left us to dress for his part.

“ “ Jack played the leading role of Lord Arlington, a wealthy and titled roué, who had contracted a secret marriage with a farmer’s daughter under a false name. He was very fond of his new wife and also of their daughter; but Lady Arlington had him followed by Scotland Yard men, and she was fast getting onto his curves, and at last had all the evidence she needed. She gave him the choice of giving up his country-girl wife or be prosecuted for bigamy. If it had only been the other way—to give up her ladyship—how quickly he could have made a choice! He lied like a gentleman and a traveling-man, and protested his innocence, but Lady Arlington had the groceries on him, and his fairy tales would not go—with her ladyship. Of course his girl-wife was ignorant of his identity, and he had to lie to her like a millionaire making his returns to the income-tax collector. Finally nasty rumors reached the young wife, but she refused to credit them and stood by him with a faith and loyalty that was beautiful. Even after he was arrested and haled into court on a bigamy charge that had very adhesive qualities about it, the young wife, in order to save him, swore on the stand that she never saw him before, but that he greatly resembled her husband. This was a stunner to the prosecution, and the Crown was unable to make out a case against him. Then followed the clandestine meetings between the lovers for awhile, Lady Arlington’s long horseback ride in disguise in order to surprise her

husband with the girl, and her injury from a runaway horse near the young wife's cottage. The young wife found her unconscious by the roadside and carried her to the cottage and after considerable time revived her. Lord Arlington arrived before her ladyship revived, assumed the disguise of a farmer, and helped the young wife care for their distinguished guest. She recognized the young wife, but failed to recognize her husband. The young farmer (Henry Wallace) went for a physician, and when he examined the injured woman and told her that she only had a short time to live, she got scared and told the doctor who she really was and begged him to inform her people at home. He did so, but when they arrived Lady Arlington was dead. An old family servant recognized his lordship, and in his cups he let the cat out of the bag. Here again the young wife had to do some high and lively *lying* in order to save her lover—and the father of her child. It was a trying situation for the young wife, and showed how love and faith can overcome all obstacles. This was the part that Velcie had essayed to play—and with her *own* husband in the role of Lord Arlington.

“““Oh, sister! you can never go thru it with *him*,” I said. “You had better give it up. If it was almost any other play, you might succeed; but such a role—and with your own husband, who doesn’t know that he is your husband—and also *mine*.” “Of course I can play it, and, what’s more, I’m *going to play it*, and in *my own* way, too,” said Velcie. “My nerves are all right now; and I am going to have the joy, if only in play, of resting in his dear arms again and feeling his soul-kisses on my lips night after night, and who knows what those kisses may revive? And I will softly call him *Ralph* while in his arms and living over again those Vast Forever kisses—the kisses that put IMMORTALITY in every life. And if I fail to revive his memory, I feel that he will love me all over again as *Jack Curtis*; so I will be sure of getting his love again—and perhaps himself, for I feel that he already *loves* me;” and she looked supremely happy. “Why, Velcie! would you let him make love to you as *Jack Curtis*?” I gasped in astonishment, for I’d never thot of that possibility. “Why not, sister mine?” she replied. “If I can not get him in one way, why not in some other way?” And I saw the unanswerableness of her logic; besides, as long as he remained *Jack Curtis*, what difference did it make to *me*?

“““It’s a rather daring undertaking, dauter,” said father, “but I see no harm in it, and Velcie is sure to be a winner—tem-

porarily, at least; and when he leaves his present identity he is due to return to La Salle Verndon, and from that identity to Dr. Holmes, then back to Jack Curtis again; so if he wants Velcie to marry him as *Jack Curtis*, that will assure her *twice* as much of him as she would otherwise get. If he prefers *you*, Loree, by all means marry him again. It seems to me that Velcie has hit on a brilliant scheme to get her husband back—without his *knowing* it;” and papa actually laughed at the humor of it, and so did Velcie, but I must admit that it seemed more like tragedy to me.

““At last the fatal Monday night rolled around, and Velcie surely did make a hit. She threw her lines to the wind and simply followed her heart, and caused a tremendous sensation, and was called before the curtain until she could not respond any more. The applause was so deafening and persistent that she came out again and sang an old song that Ralph had composed, and played her own accompaniment on the guitar, and the feeling and soul-expression she put in it scored another big hit. And Mr. Curtis gasped with astonishment and wonderment, and asked: “Where did you get *that* song?” “Oh, that is one I learned in *Baton Rouge*,” Velcie replied; “an old lover taught it to me; we used to sing it together;” and she transfixed him with a look that must have gone thru him and clinched itself on the other side; but there were no results, so far as memory was concerned. “I should like to have the song, so I may learn it too, for I like it,” continued Jack. “Oh! very well, Jack; I will teach it to you,” said Velcie. “Could you come to the hotel to-morrow forenoon?” “To be sure I can,” said Jack. “I would go anywhere to meet you, my dear Velcie; so look for me at 10 o’clock or earlier.”

““Then we returned to the hotel; and Jack insisted on escorting Velcie to the carriage and politely handing her in and kissing her hand adieu.

““As soon as the carriage was under way, I gathered Velcie in my arms and squeezed and congratulated her, and so did father. “Wonderful! Magnificent! I’m indeed proud of you, Velcie!” he exclaimed, and continued to hug her. “I feel sure he will ask you to marry him to-morrow.” “I hope so, Father Vangive, for I really believe I shall die if he doesn’t,” said Velcie.

“““Well, of all the strange cases and puzzling things, this has them all beaten!” exclaimed father, more to himself than to either of us. “I admit that it is a past master in the puzzling line—and then some,” returned I.

“ “ “But if he marries you now, Velcie, and then changes to La Salle, what will you do?” I asked curiously. “Why, just patiently wait till my turn comes again, either as Mrs. Holmes or as Mrs. Curtis,” she replied, seeming to enter into the spirit of the case with a feeling of jollity instead of sorrow. “There is no use of being blue and worrying about our strange fate, for we can’t help it, and we have agreed on just letting things take their inevitable course;” and again she looked quite amused and happy. “I guess you are right, sister mine; so I will just accept whatever Fate has in store for me, and bear my cross the best I can,” said I resignedly. “That is the only way to look at it, Loree,” said papa, “and I am glad we all agree on what to do with this strange *elephant* we have on our hands;” and he gave a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER X.

JACK PROPOSES TO HIS NEW STAR.

“ “ “At 9:45 o’clock the next forenoon a page brought Mr. Curtis’ card to Velcie and she ordered that he be sent up at once,” said my visitor. “She was dressed in that becoming soft gray dress that was trimmed in that soft and whispering shade of red, and she surely did look beautiful and entrancing. How could Jack Curtis help falling in love with such a rare and talented little woman? He could not, even if he wanted to, and he showed no symptoms of desiring to keep from falling in love with her. Fate was again dealing and we could not object to the kind of a hand she dealt us, and if the fickle jade should choose to deal Velcie more aces than fell to my lot—well, I just had to grin and bear it. It is strange I felt no jealousy toward Velcie, but I loved her as tho she were my own sister, and father just worshiped her and Luvele. I really believe he thot more of them than he did of me and Rambert.

“ “ “Ah! *buenos dias, la belle Velcie!*” Jack exclaimed in a mixture of Spanish and French; then he advanced toward her with his heart in one eye and his soul in the other one, and reached out his hand for hers; but she smilingly extended both of her pretty white hands toward him, and exclaimed: “I never felt better in my life, señor, and the sight of yourself has completed my happiness;” then she drooped her proud and beautiful head and tried to outblush a full-blown June rose that has just held a tryst with the sun. “My own precious darling!” he exclaimed as he harvested her to his hungry heart, and somehow or other their lips met in the middle of the street and swapped souls. “My own dear Ral—

I mean Jack," she softly breathed against his cheek, and tried to keep him from seeing her happy blushes. They just stood there and squeezed and kissed each other for a few minutes; then he held her at arms' length and looked long and searchingly in her eyes—and away beyond—but only emerald vistas of flowers and tangled vines and dew-empowered grass met his vision. He seemed satisfied, for he took her again in his arms and they exchanged some more of those Vast Forever kisses that keep the beauty and fragrance in the flowers and rainbow the heart with immortality. "Little sweetheart mine," he said, "as Nature intended us for each other, will you become my wife?" and again their lips melted into soul-music and heart-melody. "Yes, dear heart—my own sweet lover of the Long Ago, I will unite my life with yours—for better or for WORSE—just as Mistress Fate decides," replied Velcie; and her pretty white arms silently found their way around his neck and just stayed there, or at least that is where they were when I interrupted them with:

" " "I beg pardon, Romeo and Juliet, but if you mortals have not lost the taste for food, father and I desire the honor of entertaining you both at luncheon, which will be served in our private dining-room in about fifteen minutes." "Ah! thank you, señora; I am famishing—as hungry as the great and remorseless Sahara ever is for rain," said Jack; and he came forward and held out his hand to me like a naughty boy caught with the blackberry jam around his mouth. "I congratulate you both," said I; and his hand held mine in a warm and friendly grasp, and Velcie timidly came and took me in her arms and blushed happily over my left shoulder and down my back. Then I escorted them to the dining-room just as father was entering. We went in together, with Jack between us and an arm around each of us. The electric touch of his dear arm almost made my self-control desert me, but I just had to play my part and not break down. I would not for the world let Velcie outdo me in the acting line; so I just got a fresh hold on my riotous nerves and smiled and looked as happy as tho it were my wedding—instead of my funeral—temporarily, at least. "I am glad to meet you, my boy," exclaimed father cordially; "and I see that congratulations are in order. Bless you, my children;" and he put an arm affectionately around them and playfully bumped their heads together, and the laff that followed relieved the fearful tension that threatened to snap my nerves asunder.

" "We all fell to, and enjoyed our excellent luncheon; and I

never saw a happier pair in all my life. I thot, "What a pity they are not playing 'Romeo and Juliet' to-night!" Each night Velcie scored a bigger success, and the house was packed to its capacity at every performance.

" " "And when is the happy event to take place?" asked father tentatively. Velcie and Jack both looked at each other sheepishly, and the question-mark was in their eyes. "Why—er—really, Father Vangive, sister interrupted our little seance awhile ago, and we have had no opportunity to decide on the date yet," replied Velcie, and she blushed like a night-blooming cereus in the tangled moonlight. "I can be ready in a week, I reckon," she continued, and looked across at Jack hungrily. "Oh, yes! I can be ready then—or in three minutes," Jack facetiously added. "There is nothing like promptness, my boy," commented father; and we all again joined in the merriment. "Very well," said Valcie; "then at 11 o'clock next Tuesday forenoon, and we can then have a wedding breakfast right here in this room, and the whole company can be present." "That suits me to a t," said Jack enthusiastically; and he reached across the table and clasped her hand a moment—and it was one of those elongated minutes that aren't very particular about the number of seconds they contain. So it was sealed and settled, and now we must bestir ourselves in order to have a suitable trousseau ready, and a week is a very short time in which to prepare for such an important event. But Velcie had some more radical and romantic ideas in that precious little head of hers, and she quietly remarked:

" " "For some unaccountable reason, I carefully packed my wedding dress, veil, slippers, and all in my trunk when we left Baton Rouge, for I had a premonition or hunch that I would need them again; so you see—" "For goodness sake, Velcie!" I exclaimed; "you are not going to be married a second time in the same garments? It brings bad luck, sure." "Bad fiddlesticks!" she laffed. "If I were to be married to another man, I should not wear them, of course; but as I am to be married to the same man again, what difference does it make?" and she looked at father and me with a quizzical and devilish light in her dancing eyes. "Besides, it may remind him of the *past*," and she sighed softly to herself. "I think it is a splendid idea," agreed father; "besides, it is so romantic, and I confess that I am growing sentimental myself." That settled the trousseau question, for when father and Velcie both voted "yea" on a question, it was useless for me to bring in a minority

report; so I acquiesced, and we fell to talking over the other details of the affair, and especially considering the wedding breakfast. That must be a real affair—something *bon ton* and *recherché*, in order to reflect the proper credit on the high contracting parties.

“‘As soon as Jack had departed, father went down and saw the manager about the breakfast and that wise and astute man sent a page to summon the *chef*. His cookship soon arrived and addressed father and the manager in correct French:

“‘“Ah! certainly, m’sieurs. I know just what the occasion requires and how to prepare and serve it—just leave it to Jacquez;” and he struck an attitude and caressed his stiletto moustaches in a manner that precluded all discussion; so it was left to the talented son of La Belle France, and Jacquez surely did make good and produced the goods, or rather the eats.

“‘The wedding was a quiet but swell affair, and was attended by the entire company and two managers of other theaters in the city. The mayor performed the ceremony for them, and everything went off as smoothly as could be desired.

“‘If anyone was happier than Velcie and Jack, it was Ulda and Luvele, for now they were sisters indeed and could be together all the time. The two little girls had been inseparable from their first meeting, and now their joy knew no bounds.

“‘The daily papers had full and sensational accounts of the affair, but did not know the truth about the strange wedding. The *Republic* had it:

“A ROMANTIC WEDDING IN THEATRICAL CIRCLES.

“Mr. Jack Curtis, Leading Man in the Southern Stock Company,
Is United in Marriage to His Leading Lady, the Petite and Beautiful Little Ingenue, Miss Velcie Holmes—The Ceremony
Takes Place on the Stage of the Olympic Theater in
the Presence of a Vast and Curious Audience—
The Mayor Officiates as Clergy-
man”—Etc., Etc.

And then followed several pages about the wedding breakfast, the romantic meeting of the parties, and Velcie’s sudden entrance into the theatrical business, etc.

“‘Well, it was all over at last, and Velcie had regained her husband—and also mine, and I luffed as the humor of it dawned on me.’

“‘Excuse me, madam,’ I said to my visitor, ‘but one of the

strangest features of the case is the fact that you and Mrs. Holmes bore each other no feeling of jealousy. Are you quite sure that you never experienced a feeling of jealousy or hatred for the woman who took your husband away from you?

"Yes, Doctor," replied my visitor, "I am positive that I never felt jealous of her, and instead of hating her I really love her, and I am just as fond of her child as I am of my own. I know it is a very unusual thing, but I am also certain that Velcie is just as fond of me and has never felt a twinge of jealousy nor hatred toward me. She loves me just like I do her; and now that they are married, and papa and I must leave them, I really don't know what we shall do without her, Luvele and Ulda.

"Dr. Saunders," she continued, "I want you to give me your own true opinion of the case, and I especially want to know whether or not medical science can help La Salle. Of course, I am not his first wife and, under the law, no wife at all; and neither was Velcie his wife as Mrs. Holmes, but now she is his legal wife and the only one who has a rightful claim upon him."

"That is, if Zurane Lambert was his first wife," I replied; "otherwise, she was not a legal wife; and, furthermore, if he had a wife prior to his marriage to Zurane and that wife is not divorced and still lives, *she* is his *only legal* wife, and in that case Velcie's claims are devoid of all legality."

"Oh, Doctor!" said my visitor, "I had not thot of that possibility and I don't think that Velcie has either."

"Well, it doesn't make any difference now," I said, "for as they are united again and are so happy, it would be useless and cruel to call her attention to all the fine techincalities of the law in regard to the legal status of the case."

"Father and I both agree with you on that point, Doctor," said my visitor; "but what I most want light on now is, how his strange mental triality is likely to end—that is, will he ever revert to his other two known identities, and is he likely to have yet other identities?"

"As we have no record of such a case, Mrs. Verndon, I cannot enlighten you on that point," I replied. "However, there are a few cases on record of double identity, or soul duality, and we know how they progressed and terminated; so, by the law of analogy, we may make a fairly reliable prognosis of this strange case."

"All right, Doctor; let us have your opinion of the case—that is what I came here for," continued my visitor.

“ ‘Very well, madam,’ I replied; ‘but my opinion in this case is only a guess and you are welcome to it. In the cases of double identity the victim has always gone from one identity to the other with considerable regularity, but the time he remains in one identity may vary—that is, he may remain in that identity a year at one time, and the next time he comes to that identity he may remain longer than a year or for less time than he did before. In one noted case in Austria the man remained in one of his identities for five years the second time he came to it, but on his third return he only stayed nine months, and then suffered a sudden stroke of apoplexy and died the second day without regaining consciousness.’

“ ‘Oh, heavens! is it possible that my poor husband may have such an untimely fate?’ she asked.

“ ‘I can’t be sure, madam,’ I replied, ‘but he is most likely to end in paresis, apoplexy, or insanity—melancholy dementia. But cheer up, and let us hope for the best—at least for a more fortunate termination of the case. I should like to meet Mr.—er—Curtis; perhaps I could then throw some light on the case.’

“ ‘Just the thing, Doctor,’ said my visitor. ‘They are coming here to visit me and father when their season closes, and then we are all planning a trip to the seashore for the remainder of the season. We can have you come out and dine with us, and we can all play tennis and golf together, and thus you and La Salle can be thrown together a great deal, and you can thus have ample opportunity to study him; and also meet Velcie and father and study our children and see if they show any unusual mental symptoms. Do you know, Doctor, I have been wondering lately if my precious little Rambert may not develop the same mental ailment that his father has? He is so like La Salle in every way, and has the same inordinate fondness for music, etc.’

“ ‘It is just possible,’ I reluctantly admitted; ‘but it is quite useless to cross a river before you get to it.’ And I tried to have her look on the bright side of the picture as much as possible.

“ ‘Very well then, Doctor,’ continued my visitor; ‘we will arrange for you to visit us, and maybe you may be able to discover something that might help us. And now, Doctor, how much do I owe you?’ she asked.

“ ‘Not a cent, madam,’ I said. ‘I haven’t been of any service to you yet, and my poor opinion in the case is only guess-work. But I should like to keep in touch with you and learn how they are getting along; and I shall be glad to meet La Salle and his wife

when they come to visit you. Keep me posted, madam, and if I can be of any help to you, let me know. I am greatly interested in the case and desire to investigate and study it.'

"Mrs. Verndon thanked me warmly and departed—somewhat relieved, but still on the fence—only the fence was a little higher."

"Whew!" exclaimed Kumdon, as the old Doctor paused and closed his memorandum-book and wiped his glasses carefully before putting them away. "Is that all of it?"

"Oh, no, my dear boy! that is just the curtain-raiser—the preliminary bout," replied the Doctor, "but I don't feel equal to continuing it to-night; so if you come out here again Wednesday night, I will have the balance of the data on hand, and then we will resume where we leave off to-night. You will need several days to put it together properly, and in the meantime you can write out what I have told you to-night. And now we will go down and join the ladies awhile and have some refreshments—and, perhaps, a little music."

"Very well, Doctor," said Kumdon; "and I cannot find words to express my gratitude for this wonderful story you have furnished me. Gee! but won't it lay them out cold?" and the boy turned a handspring to express his joy.

Velden and Evangeline were both pleased to see the young reporter again, and Velden remarked:

"Mr. Spry, I know grampum must have just bored you nearly to death up in that old den of horrors of his."

"On the contrary, Miss Saunders," said Kumdon, "I never enjoyed anything so much in all my life."

"Not even me?" Velden asked; and the little witch pretended to pout and feel offended.

"Oh! of course," Kumdon replied; "but that's different, Miss Saun—"

"Why not just say 'Velden' and cut out all that state-occasion dignity?" smiled the little elf in a most tantalizing and fascinating manner.

"To be sure, if you prefer it; and *my name* is just *Kumdon*; and I never did go in much for this highbrow dignity stuff either."

"Oh! thank you, KUMDON—what an odd and pretty name!" said Velden.

"Yes; it kind o' goes well with *Velden*," answered Kumdon; and the little pirate smiled up his own sleeve, and his heart was dealing from the bottom of the deck, or that is the way Yulvern

would look at it, and as her name hopped on the deck of his memory just then his face tried to pull off a rainbow stunt.

"Why all those blushes, Mr.—er—oh! I mean Kumdon?" asked Velden.

"Oh! nothing in particular," Kumdon replied. "I'm just naturally shy, as Captain Stephens would say."

"I should like to meet the Captain—and also his niece," said Velden, and she shot him a look that deprived the bull's eye of its vision.

"I am sure I should be pleased to have you meet them," said Kumdon, "and I feel sure they would like to meet you, especially as you are a friend of mine."

"I feel sure the Captain and I would get along famously together, for I imagine he is something of a humorist and a wag, and I should enjoy getting your history from him, for I just know he is something of a historian, but I am not so sure about hitting it off with his niece," said Velden; and she watched his face like a cat does a mouse-hole.

"Oh, I am sure you would like Yulvern!" he exclaimed in a confused way that was laffable.

"Oh, what a beautiful name—far prettier and more romantic than mine!" said Velden. "I am just going to be named all over again;" and she knew how to use her mental scalpel and was using it too, and without the merciful intervention of an anesthetic.

"Velden!" exclaimed the Doctor, "I am going to send you right to bed this minute if you don't quit dissecting Mr. Spry with that merciless tongue of yours. Just see how the poor lad is blushing and suffering."

"Oh! that's all right, Doctor," said Kumdon. "We reporters are used to the scalpel—and usually without an anesthetic;" and he shot one at Velden that caused her to wince.

"Here, my boy; sample this nectar of the gods, for you will need some new pigment for that story," continued the Doctor.

"I thank you, Doctor; and here's lookin' at ye, Velden," said Kumdon, and he reached over and touched glasses with hers. "Ah! Doctor, that's an excellent vintage and it will put new wings on my Pegasus, and perhaps—perhaps he may mutiny and run away."

Then they all laffed at the Doctor's expense.

"There, grāmpum," said Velden, "you see your sympathy is all wasted; and I am not even going to hone my scalpel the next time I go after him. But if Mr. Spry will go to the piano and play

and sing that beautiful song of his, I may bury the hatchet—so deep the handle won't even stick up;" and she caressed Kumdon with her wonderful eyes until he didn't remember whether the Captain's niece was named Yulvern or just plain Mary Jane.

Kumdon turned himself loose and made a bigger hit than before with the song, and as an encore sang another of his own compositions. The spirit (or the wine) was now moving him, and he played and sang like one possessed.

Velden's beautiful eyes sparkled like the soft and dreamy moonlight on the Tombigbee River in April. Then they sang a duet together, and Kumdon consulted his watch and gasped:

"I had no idea it was so late, and I must hurry to the office and hatch up something for to-morrow's issue;" and he was off like a rocket.

"Well, my boy, don't forget where we live. Come any time you can. Good night;" and the old Doctor turned and proceeded to climb the wide and winding stairs.

"Good night, Mr. Spry," called Evangeline softly from the adjoining door.

"Aren't *you* going to say good night, Velden?" asked the boy in a bantering manner.

"Nope. I have not had time to talk to you yet," replied Velden, "and I only had seven hundred and ninety-six things I wanted to ask you;" and she slipped her pretty little hand over on his sleeve and walked toward the door with him.

"Good night, Velden," said Kumdon. "I have enjoyed myself very much, and I hope to see you all soon again;" and he was off at last.

"Why the '*you all*'?" she fired after him; but only Echo answered her.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DOCTOR CONTINUES HIS STORY.

The following Wednesday night soon rolled around, and then the young reporter feverishly bent his steps toward Dr. Saunders' picturesque old home in the suburbs, for the youngster was crazy to get the remainder of the strange tale, for he had the story in good shape, and had drawn on his artistic imagination freely for the lace and other airy nothings for the trimmings. He intended it to be a real, sure-enuff story—a soul-gripper—a never-to-be-forgotten yarn that coming generations would whisper to their grandchildren

and shudder—even in August. He also had it well illustrated with appropriate drawings, and all he needed now was the finishing materials—the rafters and shingles for the roof. He could draw on his own imagination for a cupola, if one were needed to give it a finished and artistic finale.

The old Captain and Monsieur Experience had both taught Kumdon the importance of doing things well, and he had surely done a James Dandy job on the story the old Doctor had given him; the young pirate had also done a pretty good job in the way of making a mash on Velden, altho it was really unintentional on his part. He just had to be awfully nice to the old Doctor and his family, and Velden, liking the young cub, mistook his urbanity and polite badinage for a personal interest in her beautiful self. She was badly spoiled anyway, and accustomed to having her own way and everything she wanted.

The old Doctor had no children of his own, and had raised Velden since she was a year old and she was to be the only heir to his large and rapidly growing fortune. She was a very talented and clever young lady, and much sought after by the young swains everywhere she went. The very idea of a young man not immediately falling for her and unconditionally surrendering himself was indeed a surprise and also a shock—to her pride and vanity.

“How dare he play with me and then laff at me!” Velden exclaimed to herself that night when Kumdon hurried away and did not even deign to answer that last question.

Velden studied herself long and critically in the big full-length French mirror, stamped her dainty No. 3 foot, and her glorious eyes just stormed and flashed like a volcano in active eruption.

“I will just make it a point to call on Captain Stephens and get acquainted with Yulvern, and then I may get an answer to the last question I fired after Kumdon,” said Velden; and a look of determination steadied her wonderful eyes until they appeared like twin Gibaltars.

Velden never realized how difficult it would be to call on the Captain without a proper excuse and errand. She could not just tell him point-blank that she wanted Kumdon and that the Captain’s niece must give him up—oh, no! that would never do. She must use diplomacy.

On Wednesday Velden was up early, and had her hair beautifully dressed and herself all dolled-up in her most becoming dress—a soft gray trimmed with a little autum-leaf red, and a deep red rose

in her dusky hair—no jewelry. She was indeed a picture of girlish loveliness and rare beauty.

“Ah! I see you are all dolled-up, my child,” called the Doctor when he came home Wednesday evening, “and that reminds me that I have an engagement with that young reporter to-night.”

“You mean, grampum, that *we* have an engagement with Mr. Spry,” said Velden; and she came and wound her pretty arms around the old man’s neck and gently kissed him.

“Oh! and so that’s the way the cat is jumping,” said the Doctor; and he patted Velden’s pretty head and kissed her. “Well, Kumdon is a mighty fine young man, Velden,” continued the Doctor; “and if you all decide to hitch up, your granddad will bestow his blessing.”

“Oh, grampum!” exclaimed Velden, “you are just a darling! No wonder I love you so.”

Then Velden went to the piano and began to play the song that Kumdon had first sung for them, and she was pouring out her whole soul thru the beautiful and stirring words when the old-fashioned knocker resounded thruout the house. It indicated impatience and youth; and Velden knew who it was, for she beat the Doctor to the door by several beats and flung it wide and exclaimed:

“Good evening, Kumdon! *Kum* right in. Grampum is waiting for you; and I have a colored bird to pick with you.” Then she gave him both her pretty hands and he continued to keep possession of them, and the Doctor had to shake hands with Kumdon’s elbow.

“Now, Velden,” said the Doctor, “if you are going to dissect our guest again, just wait till I go and get some ether. We might just as well be humane and make it comfortable for him.”

“Oh, thank you, Doctor!” said Kumdon. “It looks as tho I shall need the dream-stuff to-night.” Then, addressing the lady, he continued: “Velden, I feel quite flattered that you have learned my song and can sing it so beautifully. Won’t you humor me by playing and singing it?” and he gave her a look that should only have been used on Yulvern.

“With pleasure and all my vocal cords,” said Velden. Then she played and sang it with a depth of feeling and a wild-flower beauty that even astonished her grandfather and carried Kumdon away up beyond the snow-line, for he shuddered and gasped and was profuse with his praise and compliments. The girl was su-

premely happy, for she had sung his song and outdone the author and won his unstinted praise.

Just then the old family servant announced dinner; and Kumdon politely offered his arm to Velden, and the Doctor and Evangeline brought up the rear. The dinner was an excellent one, and they were all in a hungry and happy mood and did full justice to it. Velden and Kumdon just sparkled with wit and brilliant repartee, and the Doctor and Evangeline could scarcely get a word in edgewise.

"Now, grampum," said Velden at the close of the feast, "I warn you that you must not keep Kumdon up there in that old den of horrors more than an hour, for I have a million things to say to him;" and she looked over at the boy appealingly.

"I thank you, Miss Saun—I mean Velden," said Kumdon; "but if you knew how much I enjoy the Doctor's company and his rare stories, you would not call his interesting study a 'den of horrors.' It is the most charming place in Cincinnati—that hasn't the good fortune to be graced by *your* charming society;" and he rose and made a very low and mock bow with both hands on his heart.

Velden's eyes flashed a sarcastic reply, but the Doctor cut them short.

"Now, my boy," said the Doctor, "if you feel equal to the task, we will hie away to that 'den of horrors' and resume our seance."

"I am quite ready, Doctor; lead the way," replied Kumdon. Then, turning to Velden, he said: "Ta, ta, Miss Sarcasm; *au revoir*."

"You had better make it *au revoir*, you Indian," replied Velden; and she flashed him a look that would make a wooden cigar sign want to go swimming in the Muskingum River.

"Take the big rocker over there, my son," said the Doctor when they reached his "den," "and you will be more comfortable. Help yourself to the Havanas while I get my old briar going, and then we will lift the curtain and I will introduce you to the same company of artists we had before.

"It was on the twelfth of June of the same year and about three weeks after Mrs. Verndon had called on me for my opinion of her husband's strange mental malady, if it can be called such, when she came again, and she was about as excited as before, only this time it was more the exaltation of joy than of fear and dread," continued the Doctor.

“‘Good afternoon, Doctor Saunders. I am here to bother you again, you see;’ and she stepped in and gave me her dainty white hand, and with it a grasp that was a whole dictionary.”

“Excuse the interruption, Doctor,” said Kumdon; “but isn’t such an ailment a malady?”

“Well, I hardly know. You see, he is in perfect health and absolutely sane in each identity, and as there is no other case like it, we can’t exactly classify it. He is perfectly normal in each identity, and the only thing that might be termed an abnormality would be the wonderful changes thru which he passes and the complete amnesia that follows each transition. But a change, unless it is followed by and accompanied with abnormal actions, can hardly be termed a malady or a delusion.” And the good Doctor looked as tho he were not quite certain about his own lucidity and sanity.

“I thank you, Doctor,” said Kumdon. “I am now about as clear on that point as you are and that will be sufficient for my story. The more uncanny and outlandish it is the better.”

“Right you are, my boy; right you are,” said the Doctor; and he refilled his pipe and then consulted his memoranda and proceeded with his strange tale:

“‘Doctor,’ continued Mrs. Verndon, ‘my sister and her husband, Mr. Curtis, arrived day before yesterday and are going to stay and be our guests about ten days, and then papa and I are going with them to the seashore for a month or longer. They both look fine and are the happiest pair I ever saw, and Luvele and Ulda are the happiest and finest pair of kids I ever saw. They both are crazy about Rambert already and he is daffy about them and he and Luvele are inseparable; and the first thing Ulda asked was: ‘Oh, papa! he’s my little brother, isn’t he?’” and she just threw her arms around Rambert and squeezed and loved him, and he took right up with her and calls her his big sister and Luvele his little sister. I never saw three such happy children; and they all are the living image of their father and he seems greatly puzzled about it. When he saw little Rambert the child ran to him and held out his arms and cried: ‘Daddy! daddy!’” And then Jack took him up and said: ‘Bless his little heart! he looks just like Ulda and Luvele and one would take him to be their brother.’” Then he kissed the child and tossed him in the air, and the little fellow just screamed with delight. I thot my nerves would desert me and I feared I would faint, but Velcie came to my rescue just in time by saying: ‘Come to Aunt Velcie, Rambert. Uncle Jack is tired;’ and she

held out her arms to him and he went to her and proceeded to love and play with her. It pleased me greatly to see that she was just as fond of Rambert as I was of her little girl.

“‘Jack remembers papa as the man he met in St. Louis, but not as the one who was his father-in-law back in Louisville. He remembers everything connected with each identity only while in that identity; but the thing that puzzles him most is the remarkable resemblance between the three children. He can’t understand it at all and we don’t try to explain it to him.

“‘We dine at 6 o’clock this evening, Doctor, and we hope to have the honor of your presence.’

“‘Very well, Mrs. Verndon,’ I said; ‘I will be on hand; and please arrange the table so I sit opposite Mr. Curtis, for in that way I can study him better; and I want you to sit next to me, and Velcie can sit by her husband; and I want Rambert and Luvele between you and me.’

“‘All right, Doctor,’ replied Mrs. Verndon; ‘everything shall be arranged as you suggest.’ Then she gave me her hand, smiled her gratitude, and departed.

“I arrived an hour before the dinner hour, as I wished to have a little time to talk with the different members of the family and size up Mr. Curtis—if I could. I was introduced as an old college chum of Mr. Vangive’s and as a Johns Hopkins man, thinking that fact might dent Jack’s amnesia, but it did not.

“‘Mr. Curtis, I understand you are from Baltimore,’ I said. ‘Y-e-s, originally,’ he replied, ‘but it has been so long ago that I remember very little about the place;’ and he seemed far away in his thots. ‘I am pretty much in the same boat,’ I said. ‘I took my degree at that place—Johns Hopkins, but it has been so long ago I fancy I am rather rusty about the old town. I don’t suppose you ever attended the great university there?’ ‘Well—n-o, not exactly; but I had a school chum who graduated from that college,’ he said, ‘and he and I roomed together all one winter while he was finishing his education there, and he was always talking about the place and its professors. I was clerking in an engineer’s office at the time and was present when he got his sheepskin;’ and he continued to have that far-away expression in his eyes.

“‘Your friend and chum was a doctor?’ asked Vangive before I could come back. ‘Oh, yes! Dr.—Dr.—what was that name of Ralph’s?’ asked Jack; and he looked tired and seemed excited. ‘Ralph! Was that his first name?’ asked Velcie, and she almost

leaped to her feet. 'Calm yourself, dear,' replied Jack; 'what difference does it make what the poor chap's name was?' and he looked across and said something to Ulda.

" 'My old friend and college chum, Robert Holmes,' I resumed, 'had a very promising son named Ralph—yes, Ralph Edgerton Holmes, and I understood that his father intended to send him to Johns Hopkins. I wonder if it could be possible?' 'That was his name!' exclaimed Jack, with considerable warmth; 'Ralph E. Holmes; but the poor chap was drowned soon after quitting college and locating somewhere in Indiana. I had entirely forgotten about Ralph till you all recalled his name. And so you and his father were in college together?' and Jack looked at me with mild interest.

" 'What kind of looking chap was this Ralph Holmes?' asked Velcie, and she turned and looked her husband straight in the eyes, and the rest of us watched his face closely. 'Oh! about my size,' answered Jack, 'only not quite so tall, and about two years my junior, and very fond of reading novels, and fell for every pretty girl he met. But why are *you* so interested in him? You never met him.' 'N-o,' answered Velcie; 'but I had a girl chum who married him, I think, or at least another Ralph E. Holmes, and I thot that possibly her husband might be your old friend and chum;' and she smiled sweetly at him and then turned to me with a puzzled look. 'N-o,' replied Jack; 'they couldn't be the same, for my old friend was drowned soon after locating in Fort Wayne, Indiana; and he never married.'

" 'I changed the subject, as I did not wish to have Jack questioned any farther along that line.

" 'The rest of the meal passed off quietly and we were all in a happy mood at its close. Vangive, Jack, and myself enjoyed our cigars for about twenty minutes after dinner, and then joined the ladies in the sitting-room.

" 'I understand you are a musician, Mr. Curtis,' I said to Jack, and politely asked him to play the banjo, which I handed him. To my astonishment, he took the instrument and played it as tho the old Nick were in his nimble fingers. Then he asked Mrs. Verndon to sing and play on the piano; she readily complied with his request and played and sang the song he first played for her, and she put her whole soul in it and sang it with such power and pathos he jumped to his feet and declared it reminded him of something. Then he pressed his temples with both hands and sat in deep meditation

for a few minutes. 'It is strange,' he mused, more to himself than to any of us, 'but it just won't quite come back. And your voice sounds so much like hers—the one who sang it for me;' and he went to the piano and gently placed his hand on her shoulders and sighed.

"It was a tense moment, and we all expected to see him change back to La Salle Verndon again, but he did not. We thought that Velcie would faint or scream, but by an extra effort she controlled herself. I was watching every expression on Jack's face, but could make nothing out of it.

"Then he offered his arm to Mrs. Verndon and led her over to where Velcie was sitting between Luvele and Ulda; he offered his other arm to Velcie and said: 'Let's stroll thru the grounds for awhile—just us three.' We were all astounded at this peculiar freak, but I motioned for all of us to remain behind and not follow them.

"After they were gone, Mr. Vangive looked at me and said: 'Well?' 'A hole in the ground—a blank wall, or any other old thing you may like,' I replied. 'It's got my Nancy animal, and is an extreme case of memralj—whatever that is.' 'The case is the champion goat-getter,' returned Mr. Vangive, 'and I have long ago given it up.'

"Jack escorted his two wives about the grounds for about ten minutes and then he seated them on a settee and quietly sat down between them. He looked first at one and then the other, and finally put his arms around their shoulders and remarked, apparently to himself: 'I have the most beautiful and wonderful wife and sister in all the world and I am very proud of them.' Then he gave Loree a reverent kiss on her forehead and turned and planted a real lover's sweetheart kiss on Velcie's waiting lips; then he squeezed them both to him and just sighed. Poor Loree was ready to faint, but she knew she must play her part to the end in this strange drama.

"After a few minutes of silence, Jack looked up and asked Velcie to go and bring the children to him. She departed at once on her errand, and Loree exclaimed:

"'Oh, La Salle, dear! don't you know me—your own wife—Loree?' and she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him passionately.

"'Why, sister Loree, I'm your brother Jack—I'm not your husband; **and** why do you call me La Salle?'

"'Never mind, dear brother Jack,' replied Loree. 'I once had

a brother by the name of La Salle and he was so much like you—I forgot. Please forgive me;’ and she turned her face up to his, with her soul in her eyes.

“‘Of course you are forgiven, dear,’ said Jack; and then he gently kissed her on the cheek and immediately changed the subject.

“They were discussing one of the rare plants in the yard when Velcie came with the children. They all ran to him and climbed on his lap and proceeded to love and pet him. He put his arms around them and squeezed them for a minute or two, and then turned to Loree and Velcie and asked point-blank:

“‘I want you two women to explain to me *why* all three of these dear children look so like me and so greatly resemble one another;’ and he looked from one to the other, and they had hard work to control themselves sufficiently to reply at all.

“‘Well, dear husband,’ finally said Velcie, ‘it puzzles all of us as much as it does you, but we have no explanation.’

“Then he turned to Loree and asked: ‘What is your explanation, sister?’

“‘I have none, brother Jack,’ she replied. ‘It just puzzles me like it does all of us;’ and she turned to Velcie for relief.

“‘My dear husband, what difference does it make anyway?’ said Velcie. ‘We have got all three of them and we love them all and wouldn’t take the world for them;’ and she reached over and pressed his hand lovingly.

“‘But I am wondering if they could possibly be mine, and if so, why I don’t know anything about it and never saw Luvele and Rambert till you all came to the theater in St. Louis;’ and again he faced them both and sought an answer in their faces.

“‘Why, brother Jack,’ said Loree, ‘if Luvele and Rambert were your children, you would certainly know it, wouldn’t you?’ and she again searched his soul thru his eyes; but there was no answer.

“‘Dear, we will have Ulda and Luvele with us *all* the time,’ continued Velcie, ‘and when we are here with Loree and Father Vangive, or when they are visiting us, we will also have Rambert—bless his little heart!’ she exclaimed as the boy climbed up on her lap at the mention of his name, ‘and that ought to make you happy;’ and she laid her pretty head over on his breast and sighed happily, while little Rambert continued to love and squeeze his ‘Tant Velcie.’

“‘I suppose so, but that doesn’t explain anything,’ said Jack; and he looked disappointed and more puzzled than ever.

“Then they returned to the house with the children, and found

me and Mr. Vangive in the midst of a game of chess. When they left we had discussed the case a little, but could make no headway at solving it. I told Mr. Vangive there was nothing we doctors could do, and I suggested that they just quietly watch him closely, and let the case take its own natural course. I felt sure he would soon change back to La Salle Verndon again and so informed Mr. Vangive. 'As soon as the change comes he will go back to his home where he lived as La Salle Verndon and hunt up Loree and Rambert,' I said; 'and if he should change to Dr. Holmes first, he will hike out to Baton Rouge and seek Velcie and Luvele there; in fact, there is no way of knowing to which of his other identities he will go next, but it will be to them again in their turn and then back to Jack Curtis again—if he lasts that long.'

"'Is he likely to die very soon?' asked Mr. Vangive in some surprise.

"'There is no way of telling definitely, but my judgment would give him less than six years, and he will most likely pass out as Jack Curtis,' I answered. 'Still I have my doubts about his real name being Curtis, but as that is his first identity after forgetting his original self, he is most likely to wind up in that identity.'

"After I departed, Mr. Vangive reported what I had told him to Loree, and she also reported what happened out in the grounds that evening.

"The next morning Mr. Vangive persuaded Jack to take a little spin with him into town to do a little shopping, and that gave Velcie and Loree a chance to compare notes. Velcie was greatly excited when she learned that I had only given him about six years to live and had predicted three more changes in that time.

"'But, dear,' said Loree, 'the Doctor seems sure he will pass out as Jack Curtis and that will give him to you at the finish;' and Loree put her arms around the distracted girl in a comforting way. 'The Doctor feels sure he will return to La Salle Verndon next, and then to Dr. Holmes, and then back to Jack Curtis—for the last act.'

"They both sighed together, and renewed their pledge to abide by the decrees of Fate and to stand by each other and help him all they could.

"'I shall keep my home here in readiness, so when the change comes he will find everything just as he left it,' said Loree; 'and if the change comes while we are all traveling or down at the seaside, I can get back here about as soon as he can. Besides, I shall leave a note here on the table for him in case he gets back here first; the

note will merely say that I am spending the night with a nabor, and for him to make himself at home and wait.'

"'But what if he should change to Dr. Holmes first and lights out for our little nest in Baton Rouge?' asked Velcie, with a look of dread in her eyes. 'If the Baton Rouge papers have seen the account of my marriage in the St. Louis papers, they would be sure to copy it, and it would be some mix-up for him to go back there looking for his wife, who had long ago married another man. Umph! but wouldn't that be a rich and dainty morsel for Mam'sel Grundy's delicate palate?'" and the poor girl shuddered at the mere contemplation of it.

"'Well, sister mine, it is no use to cross bridges before we come to them,' said Loree philosophically. 'If he does change to Dr. Holmes, we will have to meet the dilemma in some way. It is possible that the papers there have not heard of your marriage to Jack Curtis, and if they have, we will have to manage it some way. We can watch him so closely he can't get much the start of us anyway, and it will be an easy matter to head him off, no matter where he is bound for; so we won't worry about the case any more.

"'When you all return to St. Louis and resume your playing in the stock company, father will remain here with me and Rambert, and if he disappears from you, wire us immediately, so we can be looking for him. If he doesn't show up promptly, we'll send a wire to Mrs. Gordon, your next-door nabor in Baton Rouge, and ask her if he has returned there looking for you, and if he has, to try and detain him there till you arrive. If he changes while we are at the seashore, I will hasten back here, and you can burn up the rails getting back to Baton Rouge. Now that we understand the case and know what to expect, we can manage it much better,' said Loree.

"Mr. Vangive and Jack soon returned, and Mr. Vangive reported that he and Jack had a fine time and enjoyed the ride. 'He seemed as rational as anyone,' reported Mr. Vangive, 'and his spirits were fine and his outlook hopeful. He was very enthusiastic about his wife's wonderful acting, and thot that Ulda would soon be a star of the first magnitude; and as for Luvele, he felt sure she would eclipse them all and go even beyond the top—when she was old enuff.'

"The next evening they were all my guests at a dinner and card party; and when Jack saw my granddauter and heard her play and sing, he seemed strangely affected and watched her closely all the evening, and when he and she had played and sung together,

he took her hands in his and remarked: 'Wonderful girl! Remarkable child! Which one of the gods was your father?'

"Velden considered that he was poking fun at her and made a saucy retort and then sprang away from him. He looked after her with a pained expression on his face, and came to me and asked: 'Where did you get her, Doctor?'

"I told him she was my only son's child—my beloved granddaughter, but that she had a four-edged tongue. He still looked at her and wrinkled his forehead in a puzzled way, and presently asked: 'Wasn't her father's name Harold Briggs Saunders?'

"I almost jumped in the air, for that was my son's name in full. 'Why, did you know my son?' I said excitedly.

"'Know him? Humph!' he briefly replied; then he shrugged his shapely shoulders and calmly walked to the piano, and for the next hour we never heard such divine and wonderful music in all our lives. He imitated perfectly almost every instrument and bird and animal; he did stunts that his wives never even knew he could do. We all sat and listened spell-bound, and I am sure Velden regarded him as some strange and uncanny creature from some other world. The child was really afraid of him and yet she could not keep away from him nor cease looking at him. None of us knew what might happen next, but we were all ready for it—no matter how strange it might be.

"After my guests had departed, Velden hurried to me and exclaimed: 'Oh, grampum! what kind of a strange man is he?'

"'Not strange, dear,' I said; 'just a wonderful actor and musician.'

"'But, grampum,' said Velden, 'I often meet him in my dreams, and he always looks at me that way and plays and sings like he did to-night. I don't believe in dreams, of course, but now—I don't know what I believe;' and she looked bewildered, and her eyes had something uncanny about them.

"'There, there, dear,' I said; 'run along to bed now, for it is late, and those pretty eyes won't get their beauty sleep;' and I pinched her cheeks and gave her the usual good-night kiss; but she did not want to leave me—she wanted to talk about Jack. I just had to make her go to bed."

"What is the explanation of the girl's strange conduct, Doctor?" asked Kumdon, who showed a strange interest in the case.

"Search me, Mr. Spry," said the Doctor. "It seemed that the whole world had gone daffy."

"The next day I was again a guest of Mr. Vangive's. We played tennis most of the forenoon, and after playing for about an hour, Mr. Curtis remarked to me wearily: 'Doctor, I'm awfully tired. I wish I could go home.'

" 'Well, what is to prevent it?' I asked in some surprise.

" 'I don't just know what it is, Doctor,' replied Mr. Curtis; 'but there is something pulling me in four directions at the same time, and I can't get anywhere;' and he sighed heavily again and involuntarily turned his gaze toward the east, and I noticed that his eyes had a very excited and strange appearance, and it was evident that he was having a hard struggle with SOMETHING within. He gazed longingly toward the east a few minutes, and then resumed his playing, but it was plain to see that he had lost all interest in the game. He now played like one in a deep trance, but he made no mistakes. He was an expert at tennis, just like he was at music and everything else. He was an interesting study and had a strange fascination for me.

"I felt sure that some impending crisis was about to take place, and at the first opportunity I communicated my impressions to his wives. They were both inwardly excited and doing their best to keep their nerves in leash. The remainder of the day he seemed in a deep study and at times almost oblivious to his surroundings.

"That afternoon we all attended a matinee at a roof-garden and after the second act Jack asked me to accompany him to the smoking-room, and when alone we lighted our cigars and proceeded to enjoy the fumes of the tobacco, when he suddenly turned to me and asked: 'Doctor, who is *Velden* anyway?' and he fixed his uncanny eyes on me and just looked as tho he would bore right thru my soul.

" 'Why, she's my granddauter—my son Harold's only child,' I replied, and I looked almost offended and had hard work controlling my rising indignation at the insolence of the question; but I remembered that he was my patient and under observation, so I just laffed it off pleasantly.

" 'Humph!' he said. 'I may tell you something about her some day—ah! there goes the curtain; we must hurry;' and he was up and pulling me along after him.

"We returned to our seats just in time; and both of the women shot me an inquiring glance.

"The remainder of the afternoon passed without incident; and

in two more days we were all on our way to Newport for a season. I was taken along as the guest of Mr. Vangive and Mrs. Verndon.

"Jack was very friendly toward me, but he seemed to sense that I was there for a purpose. One afternoon he and I were strolling along the beach and chatting pleasantly, when he suddenly asked: 'Doctor, *why* did you come here with us?' and again those weird and uncanny eyes bored me thru and thru.

"'Why, Mr. Vangive and Mrs. Verndon invited me to come along as their guest, and as Mr. Vangive and I were school-chums together, I came just because I was going somewhere for the season, and that it would be a pleasant way to renew our old school-days', etc.," I replied casually.

"Again he uttered that suspicious 'Humph!' and we returned to the hotel and joined the ladies and children.

"We had all been at Newport about three weeks, and everything was just going as nicely as one could wish, when one Friday morning soon after breakfast Jack said casually: 'I am going for a short stroll with Rambert, and when we return we will go in for a dip; so you all enjoy yourselves till we return.' He took Rambert by the hand, and the two went tripping down the broad gravel walk like a couple of school-kids. The little fellow was very fond of Jack, and he was now in high spirits because he had been specially selected for the walk alone with the actor. Luvele was just heart-broken because he would not let her go along.

"Loree and Velcie exchanged looks and then glanced at me significantly, but I just nodded that it was all right, and we had better not follow him. After an hour, the women became so nervous with dread apprehension that Mrs. Verndon declared she was going to search for them. Mr. Vangive and I tried to dissuade her, but she just couldn't stand the nervous strain any longer, so she strolled off in the direction Jack had taken, and in about an hour she returned looking like a ghost and declared she could not find any trace of them.

"'Good heavens!' exclaimed Velcie in terror; 'suppose he has drowned himself and the child?'

"'Oh, Doctor! what shall we do?' exclaimed Loree in almost the same breath.

"Both women were becoming hysterical in spite of all that Mr. Vangive and I could do to calm them.

"'He has probably just wandered off into the country,' said

Mr. Vangive soothingly, 'and they will turn up all right after a while.'

"The story soon ran thru the hotel and was at once the one topic of conversation. Jack had become very popular with the guests on account of some wonderful singing and playing he did in the parlors on two occasions. A searching party was soon organized and spread out in every direction, while others watched the shore and life-boats began to patrol the coast for a chance to find the bodies in case they had been drowned. The day passed away in searching, but not a trace could be found of the actor and his child. Of course, it was not known to the guests that the child was the actor's son, but there had been much comment and speculation on the subject, owing to the remarkable resemblance the boy bore to the man.

"Mrs. Verndon became so hysterical that I had to administer a hypodermic of morphine to quiet her. We all hurriedly held a consultation late that night, and it was decided to send Mrs. Verndon and her father to Cincinnati at once, in case he was there as La Salle Verndon trying to find Mrs. Verndon. Velcie and the two little girls and myself were to remain there, in case he returned to the hotel. I had the time of my life to keep the distracted double wife and mother from breaking down or going mad. I told her that he might return there any time, and she must bear up under it, so as to be ready to receive him in case he returned. The brave little soul sure did a big and successful job holding onto herself and looking after the children. The little girls were inconsolable, for they both worshiped their father, and Ulda was old enough to comprehend that something very strange and unusual had happened to her father.

"It was a rich topic for the guests and they differed in their opinions just as they would on religion or politics.

"A description of Jack was wired to the police of the other watering-places and large cities, but no trace of him could be found. It seemed as if the earth had just swallowed him whole and hadn't made a bit of noise about the act.

"In about ten days Velcie received the following wire:

" 'CINCINNATI, July 26, 18—.

" 'He is here and unhurt. Rambert is all right. Look for my letter.
LOREE.'

"She handed it to me as soon as she read it, and I simply gave out that Mr. Curtis had been found and was all right and so was the child. That was all the guests were to be told; and when one so far forgot the laws of good breeding as to try to find out more, we simply turned such an ill-bred person down politely and let it go at that; and when Velcie turned them down with a look, they stayed turned down, too. One look from her wonderful eyes was enuff—and to spare; so the incident soon became history and began to accumulate cobwebs—like all history does.

"About a week later Velcie received the following letter from Loree:

" 'CINCINNATI, August 2, 18—.

" 'MY DEAR SISTER VELCIE,—He is now La Salle Verndon again and very sick, but has no memory whatever of any other identity. He remembers papa as the man he knew as his father-in-law, but remarked one day: "It is strange, Father Vangive, but I have a dim recollection of seeing someone who very much resembled you, but I just can't recall where it was. Perhaps you have a twin brother some place?" "Yes, I have," said papa, "and it is possible that you have met *him*." "Yes, I presume that is it," said La Salle. Then he forgot all about the incident.

" 'We got here two days before he arrived, and he could not account for having Rambert with him; he merely said he did not remember how the child happened to be with him. He seemed just as glad to see me as ever, and seems as rational as anyone. We have met quite a few of our old friends and he remembers some of them, but others he fails to recognize. He seemed on the point of a complete breakdown when he arrived here, and he spent the following three days in bed most of the time.

" 'A peculiar thing is that he won't touch any of the musical instruments at all, and declares he never played at all; but he sings a great deal, but mostly songs I never heard him sing before and most of them are entirely unknown to us. Isn't it strange, dear?

" 'I am awfully sorry, Velcie, but the only thing for me to do is to enjoy the brief heaven while it is mine; and if he returns to you, I will patiently stand aside and help you both all I can.

" 'Poor little Rambert was so tickled to see me again; and the child surely did need a woman's care and attention. La Salle is becoming more cheerful every day, and plays a great deal with Rambert.

“‘Another strange thing is, La Salle won’t go to a theater at all. And he refuses coffee; he used to be so fond of it and always drank two or three cups of it. What next?’

“‘What will you do now? Papa and I think it will be best for you to return here and live quietly near us, but where La Salle will not meet you, so that we can all help in watching him closely, for we do not know when he may change to Dr. Holmes again. I should like Dr. Saunders’ opinion on this point. Papa has a neat little five-room cottage that has just been completed, and if you will come, we will have things ready for you. Wire at once if you will come.

“‘With love and all good wishes for you and the dear children,

“‘I am your sister, LOREE.’

“After perusing it carefully, and with tears in her beautiful eyes, Velcie handed the letter to me and softly sobbed while I read it over carefully twice.

“‘Well, what do you think I should do now, Doctor?’ she asked; and her great soul-saddened eyes looked almost supernatural as she watched my face.

“‘Well,’ I replied, ‘I feel almost certain that he will sooner or later return to Dr. Holmes, or possibly skip Holmes and go directly back to Curtis again, or possibly to his *real* identity, for the conviction is growing on me that he may go back to his real, original self. And I am of the opinion that he was never married under his own identity.’

“‘Why, Doctor! is it possible?’ asked Velcie.

“‘Yes, almost anything is possible to this strange soul with three windows in it,’ I answered.

“‘Well,’ said Velcie, ‘I will go and wire them that I will come back there and live near them, so as to be ready in case he returns to either Holmes or Curtis, for in that case I should be on hand to head him off and prevent his wandering away down to Baton Rouge looking for me and Luvele.’

“‘Very well,’ I said; ‘that would be my judgment in the case; besides, I want to get back and study him now as La Salle Vernon, and to see if he will recall having met me before.’

“Two days later we started for the Ohio metropolis; but as I had some business in New York, we stopped over there three days, and that gave Velcie an opportunity to see the nation’s metropolis and incidentally to divert her as much as possible, and to give the

folks in Cincinnati time to furnish the cottage and have it ready for her when she arrived.

"We soon reached Cincinnati, and Mr. Vangive met us at the stopo and carried Velcie directly to the cottage. She was delighted with it.

"It was nearly three days before Loree could get away from her husband long enough to slip over and pay Velcie and the children a visit and talk over the case. La Salle seemed strangely averse to letting Loree out of his sight for a minute—another strange freak he had developed.

"In a couple of weeks Loree announced to her husband after breakfast: 'Dear, an old friend and boyhood school-mate of papa's is coming to dine with us to-night and I want you to be awfully nice to him.'

"'Why, certainly; I will be pleased to meet any friends of yours or of Father Vangive's,' responded La Salle; 'but who is the gentleman?'

"'A Dr. Saunders—quite an elderly man, but very much of a scholar and quite an entertaining conversationalist,' replied Loree.

"'Dr. Saunders? Dr. Saun—ders? Why, I met a Dr. Saunders in Baltimore when I was a boy; but he wouldn't be quite my age, so it must be some other Saun—ders;' and he seemed troubled about the name. Several times during the day he reverted to it and asked: 'Dear, are you quite sure his name is Saun—ders?'

"'Why, yes, La Salle,' answered Loree; 'but what difference does it make anyway?'

"'Oh! none, I reckon,' he said."

CHAPTER XII.

AN ACCIDENTAL MEETING.

"I was on hand early that night," continued the Doctor, "for I wanted to have a chance to observe La Salle a little before dinner and also to engage him in conversation and see if he recollected me, etc. Mr. Vangive met me at the door and whispered that he was quite normal, but greatly troubled about the name Saunders, asserting that he knew a man by that name in Baltimore when he was a boy in college.

"'Doctor,' he said, 'it has just recently occurred to me that La Salle met your son Harold in Baltimore and probably they had some misunderstanding—perhaps they both wanted the same girl,

as youngsters often do. This may explain his strange reply that he made to you the night you asked him if he knew your son. Do you recollect his sneering and noncommittal answer and then his wonderful playing and singing? He may also have been a suitor for your son's wife's hand and was rejected by her in favor of your son.'

" 'Right you are,' said I reflectively; 'and my dauter-in-law may have marked Velden in some way prior to the child's birth, and that may account for the strange interest she takes in the man and the uncanny fascination he exerts over her.'

"Then we both fell to thinking on the strange subject, but our conclusions were only conjectures at best.

"Then we proceeded to the living-room, and Mr. Vangive formally presented me to Jack. He came forward and greeted me cordially and held onto my hand quite awhile and inquired: 'Did you ever have a son at college in Baltimore, Doctor?' and he couldn't take his eyes off my face it seemed. But he showed no signs of recognition.

" 'Why, yes,' I replied. 'My son Harold attended Johns Hopkins. It is possible that you and he met;' and I searched him closely for any sign of remembering Harold.

" 'I don't recall him now, but I may be able to do so later, and if I do, I may be able to tell you something interesting,' was his answer; then he turned and hastened to Loree, who called him to help her with something or other in the dining-room.

" 'Well, what do you make out of that enigmatical reply?' asked Mr. Vangive.

" 'Nothing much, and then it may be a rich mine,' I replied. 'I feel sure that he and Harold have met and had some kind of a quarrel, because Harold met Milvern (*his wife*) in Baltimore during his college days in Johns Hopkins, and it is quite possible that both young men were suitors for her hand. She may have met Jack first and loved him, and finding him queer, she gave him up and took Harold, and in such a case she would naturally think over her love-affair with Jack and meditate more or less on his strange mental equipment and rare talents, and in that way she has marked her child and bequeathed it a rare musical talent; and as the mother naturally dreamed a great deal of her lost lover, so does Velden dream of him and sees him in her dreams, etc.'

" 'By the eternal, Doctor! you've hit it for fair, and I can see it

all now,' said Mr. Vangive. 'If your diagnosis be true, Doctor, it also seems certain that his real original identity is different from any he has assumed—that is, that we know of.'

" 'Yes, that has been my opinion, since he has some recollections of his college days in Baltimore and he seems greatly perturbed at times because he is unable to recall them,' I continued. 'There is a dim and latent voice singing away back in his early life and he can't quite still it and neither can he give it definite form and coherency; but there is SOMETHING in his latent or subconscious mind that is struggling to be heard, and everything points to Baltimore as his early home or *alma mater*. He really may have been born in Newark, New Jersey, as he once told us he was, but it is more than likely he never went back there after quitting school in Baltimore; and it is my belief we will find his parents yet living, or, at least, his mother; and it is my opinion that his next change will be back to his real self, in which identity he will not know any of his other identities.'

" 'Great heavens, Doctor! is it possible?' exclaimed Mr. Vangive despairingly. 'Just to think what that would mean to his two wives and three children! and they all worship him.'

"Just then Loree and La Salle came in together and announced that dinner was ready; so we all proceeded to the dining-room and soon fell to discussing various subjects during the meal.

" 'Mr. Verndon, did I understand you to say that you were born in Newark, New Jersey?' I asked casually.

" 'Why—er—I really don't remember, it was so long ago; but it seems at times that it was Baltimore,' he answered. 'I can't recall clearly which place it was; but what difference does it make anyway?' and he fixed those weird and hypnotic eyes on my face and stared blankly at me until his wife distracted his attention to something else.

" 'Oh! none,' I hastened to reply, good-naturedly. 'I have some friends in Newark and thot that possibly you might know them.'

" 'If I was born in Newark, we left there when I was so young I don't remember much about it,' he said. 'But there is something and someone in Baltimore I have been trying to remember lately, but I just can't quite get them out of my *subconscious* mind;' and he looked at his wife and sighed deeply.

" 'Never mind, La Salle; it will all come back to you some

time,' murmured his wife affectionately. 'Of course, if your dear mother is living, I should like to see her;' and she laid her hand lovingly on his and gave him an encouraging look.

"‘My mother! my mother!’ he almost screamed. ‘Yes, yes, she is living, if the hounds at the hospital didn’t kill her!’ and he left the table and paced up and down the room and kept muttering and moaning to himself; then he turned and came back to the table and remarked: ‘Doctor, I almost got her then.’

"‘Your mother?’ said Mr. Vangive.

"‘Yes! y-e-s,’ he answered; ‘and our dear little home out on M—M Street. I must go and lie down for awhile,’ he announced, and immediately went up to his room.

"We all exchanged glances and fell to discussing the new phase his case was taking, and we all felt sure now that he might recall his mother and boyhood home and change back to them, and thus forget all his other identities.

"‘If he does do that, what will we all do, I wonder?’ mused Loree, more to herself than to us.

"‘Doctor, don’t you think we had better watch the house and grounds closely to prevent him from leaving in case a change comes?’ asked his wife anxiously.

"‘Yes. We must not let him slip away from us, for if he does, we may never find him again,’ said I.

"‘And shouldn’t we inform Velcie at once about the new development that is imminent?’ asked Mr. Vangive.

"‘Yes, I suppose so, as she is *two* of his wives and thus has double the interest in him that you have, Mrs. Verndon,’ I replied thoughtlessly, but saw my mistake at once.

"‘Indeed, Doctor, this is hardly a subject for levity!’ she said, giving me a look that was worse than an upper-cut and a toe-hold all combined.

"‘I beg pardon, madam,’ I said; ‘but I did not intend any levity, and I am sorry I have offended you. My language was ill-chosen—that is all.’

"‘Very well; I accept your apology,’ she said. ‘But no one could have more interest in my husband than I have—no matter how many times she might be married to him. He is my life—my *all*!’

"Mr. Vangive was dispatched to break the news to Velcie, who lived about half a mile from the Verndons. She was not much

surprised, for she was expecting something to happen almost any time, but she had not expected this new turn in the case; still, nothing might come of it, after all. 'After a little rest and quiet, he may forget all about it,' I assured her.

"'But we must keep him under close and constant surveillance, Doctor, so if he changes we can have him followed and thus keep track of him,' said Velcie to me later that night.

"I told her it was my opinion that his next change would come soon and would most likely take him back to his mother and his real self.

"'Wouldn't that be the limit, Doctor?' Velcie asked. 'If he goes back to his real self, won't he ever again return to any of his other identities?' and a look of hope sprang to her beautiful eyes as she faced me resolutely.

"'I can't be sure about that,' I told her, 'because medical science never had a case of memraj before; but it is my guess that he will never return to any of his pseudo-identities, because he is not likely to live long after he returns to his original self,' I replied as kindly as I could.

"'Oh, Doctor!' she exclaimed, 'it is awful to contemplate the end; but still I guess he would be better off dead and thus have it all over with. Anyway, I would rather know he was dead and beyond all suffering and trouble than to have him in an asylum;' and she sighed resignedly and looked at me hopelessly.

"'Yes, that would be best for all of you, I presume,' I said; 'for this awful uncertainty and nervous strain will soon break you all down and make wrecks of you.'

"'But I love him so, Doctor; I just cannot let him go;' and her eyes clouded like the thick smoke from a volcano.

"'I know it is a sad thing to lose the one you love, Velcie, but it is a fate that comes to all of us sooner or later,' said I consolingly.

"Then I bade her good-night, and drove Mr. Vangive back to the Verndon home.

"The next day Velcie and the children called on me at my office and she wanted to know if it would be all right for her and the children to meet him and see if he remembered them. I advised against this, and she promised to abide by my decision.

"About two weeks later Velcie and Luvele and Ulda were out in a near-by park for exercise and an airing, when they ran plump into La Salle. How he ever managed to elude Loree and Mr. Van-

give and the two servants is still a mystery to us all, but he did so and went for a stroll alone, and was crossing the pretty little park near the fountain when he met Velcie and the children. He seemed astonished at meeting them; and when Velcie forgot all my instructions and ran to him with arms outstretched and exclaimed, 'Oh, Jack, my darling husband! I am so glad I have found you!' and tried to put her arms around him, he pushed her away and said rather angrily: 'Excuse me, madam, but I don't happen to be your husband—in fact, I never saw you before. But how in h—l does it come that you have my little dauter with you?' and he stooped and picked up Luvele, and she just threw her little arms around his neck and clung to him and called him 'Papa Jack.'

"Then Ulda came up to him and addressed him as 'Papa,' but he just frowned at her in a puzzled way and said: 'It seems that you people are crazy. Here you claim I am your husband and this girl of yours calls me father. Why, I can't understand it at all. And how did you get hold of my little dauter *Elvie*?'"

"'Oh, Jack dear! don't you remember me—and Ulda here?' asked Velcie.

"'I never saw you before, I tell you,' he replied. 'Come on, *Elvie*; we must be going;' and he turned and deliberately strode away with Luvele in his arms. The child clung to him, but began to cry and weep. 'There! there! bless its heart,' he said; 'they shall not steal papa's little treasure again.'

"He soon reached his home, and caused a real sensation by walking in with Luvele in his arms and remarking to Loree: 'See, dear, I have *Elvie* at last.' He put the child down, and she ran to Loree and mumbled: 'Tanty Loree, Papa Jack found us in the park and took me away from mama and Ulda; he wouldn't have anything to do with them—said he didn't know them;' and the little thing nestled up closer in Loree's arms and sobbed pitifully.

"'Why, La Salle!' said Loree, 'where did you find Luvele? and why didn't you bring Velcie and Ulda along? You know I want to see them all;' and she looked at him searchingly.

"'Why, I don't know them—never saw them before,' he replied; 'and how they ever got *Elvie* with them is a puzzler. I left her in Baltimore; but I am glad I found her and have her with us. She and Rambert will make a great team, I tell you;' and he seemed greatly pleased at his find. But why he called the child *Elvie* is what puzzled us all. That was a new development, sure."

"But wouldn't his calling the child *Elvie* and declaring he left her in Baltimore point to the fact that he had a child and wife in that town?" inquired Kumdon.

"Yes, it would," replied the Doctor; "but still I thot it just a vagary. I expected to find his mother living and in Baltimore, and she might be able to explain much of the case that puzzled us all. Of course, it was possible that he had another wife and identity that we knew nothing of; but if he had, I felt sure it was his own *real* self."

"Gehosephat, Doctor!" exclaimed Kumdon in delight; "but won't this story knock them all off the Christmas bush?"

"As soon as Mr. Vangive could get away," continued the Doctor, "he hurried to my house, and together we drove to Velcie's home and talked the matter over with her.

"'It beats me, Doctor,' said Velcie. 'He claimed Luvele as his child, but under another name—Elvie, and did not recognize Ulda at all—he claimed he never saw her before; and he seemed quite indignant that I had the child with me. Oh! what am I to do?'

"'Well, it will be best not to oppose him, for fear he might become violent and kill us all and injure the children,' said I positively, and Mr. Vangive agreed with me.

"'Of course, Luvele is in good hands,' continued Mr. Vangive, 'and she and Rambert are just delighted with one another again.'

"'The real danger is, if he changes back to his original self, he may still fancy Luvele is his Elvie and take the child with him,' I explained to them.

"'Oh, heavens! no, Doctor,' said Velcie. 'I would lose my mind entirely if he should do that. My poor little Luvele! And the child just worships him, too.'

"'It would be a bad complication if he abducted the child, but there is no danger of his harming her,' I explained. 'He loves his children devotedly in all his identities, and the only danger is in opposing him and thus causing him to become violent and *very dangerous*.'

"'We shall put on more guards and see that he does not slip out and run away. I don't see how he got away to-day so easily,' said Mr. Vangive in a puzzled way.

"'Perhaps he bribed one of your servants,' I suggested as a way of explaining it.

"'Perhaps he did!' gasped Velcie. 'Oh, Doctor! can't I go

over there and help watch him and guard the children? It is certain he will take one of the children with him when he goes, just as he did down at Newport;’ and she sighed deeply.

“‘I am afraid it would greatly excite him if he were to find *you* about the place, Velcie, and he might think you were there to steal his Elvie again, and in that case he might become violent and *kill you*,’ I explained.

“‘Dr. Saunders is right, dauter,’ said Mr. Vangive. ‘Your presence would be misconstrued by him and he might kill you, thinking you meant to steal his child. One can never tell what crazy people may do. I will employ two private guards to watch the house and report immediately if he tries to leave. One of them can follow him while the other one communicates with us.’

“‘That will be the plan, I think,’ I told them.”

CHAPTER XIII.

HIS LAST IDENTITY.

“At the same time,” continued the Doctor, “over at the Vernon home the following conversation was taking place:

“‘My dear Loree,’ said La Salle, ‘I wonder how that horrid woman ever came to have our little Elvie with her? And the audacity of the creature claiming to be my wife! I suppose she is laying her plans to blackmail me; and we must watch the children closely or she may steal one of them again.’

“‘My dear husband,’ said Loree, ‘haven’t you noticed that Luvele hasn’t been here for several weeks? She went over to stay with sister awhile, as we feared that she and Rambert together would make so much noise it would disturb you. It was sister that you met and you probably imagined that she mistook you for her husband.’

“‘Why, I didn’t know you had a sister,’ replied La Salle. ‘But there is no mistake about her claiming that she was my wife; and she had another girl with her—quite a big girl, and she also called me “Papa.” Why, what is this world coming to? If I catch her nosing around here trying to steal our children, I will make short work of her, you can bet.’

“Loree was now thoroly alarmed, for she feared he might become violent at any time, and she must manage in some way to get word to Velcie and warn her to keep clear of him. After considerable coddling, she got him pacified, and persuaded him to play

the piano and sing. This seemed to rest him, and he soon forgot all about the incident.

"Loree slipped into the kitchen and sent a note to Velcie telling her of La Salle's inclination to violence and warning her to avoid meeting him on peril of her life; 'also, tell father to come home just as soon as he can,' she concluded.

"The note reached Velcie just as Mr. Vangive and myself were leaving, but Velcie asked us to remain until she read the note. She passed the note to me and I passed it on to Mr. Vangive, after reading it myself.

" 'Yes, La Salle is sure to become violent, and would not hesitate to kill anyone he caught trying to steal the children; and as he found Luvele with you once, the very sight of you would arouse him immediately to maniacal violence,' I explained to Velcie. She agreed to remain in the house and thus take no chances on a chance meeting with him.

"Instead of the noise of Rambert and Luvele playing about the house disturbing La Salle, he liked it very much and played with them like a kid himself. This greatly pleased the youngsters; and I never saw a happier family for nearly two months, when one fine morning Mr. Vangive invited La Salle to accompany him to town on a shopping expedition and to get him out of the way for a few hours, so Loree could slip over and see Velcie for awhile.

"Ever since he had changed back to La Salle Verndon, he could not bear to have Loree leave him a minute. On one occasion she started over to call on Velcie, but he saw her leave, and he snatched up his hat and was soon at her side, and wanted to know where she was going, etc. 'Oh! I am just going out for a short walk, to see if it will help my headache,' she explained. 'Very well,' said La Salle; 'my head feels a little muddled too, so I will just go along, and we can enjoy the jaunt together;' and he took hold of her arm and they fell to chatting like a pair of lovers from Covington. In fact, he watched her like a hawk, and she could not get away alone at all.

"Mr. Vangive and La Salle had visited several shops and had made a number of purchases, when all at once La Salle exclaimed: 'Excuse me a few minutes, Father Vangive, but I need a new necktie and some of those new collars they have on hand now, and if you will just wait here, I will run in there at Townsend's and get what I want;' and he jumped out of the buggy and was gone like a weasel.

"Mr. Vangive waited about fifteen minutes and then he felt that something had happened; so he got a passing boy to hold the horse till he came out. He hurried into the store, but found no trace of his son-in-law. He had come in there, a clerk told him, and had purchased two handkerchiefs, and went out the back door thru the alley, and that was all they could tell him, but that was enuff. Mr. Vangive knew that some change had come over him while in the store, but just what it was he could not guess.

"Mr. Vangive drove home as fast as the animal could go and broke the news to Loree and told her to remain right there, in case he returned and was all right; then he drove to Velcie's home and carried her and Ulda to my office in great haste. As good luck happened to be with us, he found me in.

" 'Well,' said I, 'he will either change to Dr. Holmes or go back to his own real self, so the thing to do is to notify the police and try to head him off or get track of him, and then follow him and just let him do as he wants to do.'

"So we notified the police department and gave them instructions not to molest him if they found him—just keep track of him and communicate with us, so we could follow him. We also wired Mrs. Gordon in Baton Rouge and asked her, if Dr. Holmes arrived there looking for his wife, to tell him she was on the way there and for him to wait till she arrived. We also wired the stock company in St. Louis and told them, if Mr. Curtis came there looking for his wife, to keep him there till she arrived, and to wire them at once if he returned there.

" 'But it is my opinion that he has changed back to his original self and will head for Baltimore, so I think I had better light out for Baltimore and watch for him there,' I told them.

" 'But suppose he stays here, or goes to Baton Rouge, or back to St. Louis, Doctor?' asked Velcie, with a puzzled face.

" 'I feel so sure he will go to Baltimore and be himself again, I am willing to pay all my own expenses of the trip,' I told them.

" 'But why are you so sure he will go to Baltimore, Doctor?' came Velcie right back at me.

" 'Mainly because he mistakes Luvele for *Elvie*, whoever she may be, and because he has talked so much about Baltimore lately,' I replied. 'There is some Baltimore identity away down and back in his subconscious mind that has been struggling for some time to come back and rule him again, and as that is where he spent his

earlier life, it is only reasonable to assume that his Baltimore identity is his own real self.'

"'But where does the name *Elvie* come in, Doctor?' queried Velcie, still unsatisfied.

"'Well,' I answered, 'it may be that he had a sweetheart by that name and lost her and the name still lives in his subconscious mind, and Luvele may *resemble* her; or he may have had a child named Elvie, and may or may not have been married to this old sweetheart. They may have separated or she may have died, and he may have had the child with him for awhile; and when he changed to Jack Curtis the first time, he would have forgotten all about any child he may have had when living under his own real self. If he left a child behind him in Baltimore when he changed to Jack Curtis, that child may still be living, and if the child's mother is dead, as I believe she is, it is most likely he left the child Elvie with his own mother, and then changed identities to Curtis, and probably traveled with some strolling company of players or troubadours. His own real identity and the things connected with his childhood and early youth would be sure to come back at the last and rule him—just as all people when dying recall trivial things connected with their childhood. They vividly remember these trifles, but easily forget important things that happened recently. It is most likely that at the last he will only remember his first sweetheart and this Elvie, his mother, and unimportant events in his boyhood life.'

"'Then he is not likely to still persist in his illusion that Luvele is his daughter *Elvie*?' asked Velcie, with a ray of hope in her eyes.

"'Yes, he is almost sure to do so, *unless* there should be a *real* Elvie on hand to claim him as her father,' said I positively.

"'Oh!' cried Velcie, and it sounded more like a groan, and all hope had died out of her wonderful eyes.

"Loree persisted in believing that he had changed back to Dr. Holmes again.

"After a long consultation, we thought it best to wait a few days and see if the police could find him, or await the result of our telegrams to Baton Rouge and St. Louis. After the fourth day, the police admitted that they could not find any trace of him, and we got wires from the other two places informing us that he had not yet appeared. On the fifth day Mr. Vangive, Velcie, and

myself started for Baltimore, and left the three children with Loree, as it was possible that he might come back there any time.

"After a journey of about two days we arrived in Baltimore and stopped at a quiet and little-known boarding-house out in the residence section. We began a quiet search of the theaters and hotels and rooming-houses, but no trace of him could we find. Then we called on the police department and made the rounds of all the hospitals, but no results. Our next move was to insert three personal advertisements in the daily papers for a week—one to La Salle Verndon, one to Dr. Ralph Holmes, and one to Jack Curtis, but no replies came to any of them.

"We had arranged with Loree to wire us immediately if he returned there or if she received word from Baton Rouge or St. Louis. A week soon slipped by, and we received a long letter from Loree, but she had no news to impart regarding him.

"After we had been in Baltimore about ten days, we had all been to a matinee one afternoon, in hopes we might find some clue to him thru the actors, and we noticed a very beautiful little girl, who was evidently about seventeen years old and very nervous and excited. She hurriedly entered a corner drug store and handed in a prescription to be filled.

"'Great heavens, Doctor!' exclaimed Velcie in excitement. 'Did you notice that girl? Why, she is just the image of Luvele and looks so much like Jack!'

"Vangive and I had not noticed the girl as Velcie had, so we all entered the store and sauntered around and began looking at various articles, as tho we were shopping. We soon got a good view of the girl, and there could be no mistake—there was only one man who could be her father, and that was the man we sought.

"'What shall we do?' whispered Mr. Vangive anxiously.

"'Why, it will be the best to have Velcie follow her and find out where she lives and then come back and report to us,' said I.

"We signaled for Velcie to come on out, and told her to follow the girl and find out where she went.

"Vangive and I loitered around outside and saw the girl come out with the medicine and hurry off toward the west part of the city. Velcie was right after her, and after a walk of about ten blocks she turned in at a flower-covered gate and soon entered a pretty little vine-clad cottage that stood quite a ways back from the street. It was No. 1517 Milton Street. Velcie lost no time getting back and

reporting her find. We all procured a conveyance, and were soon at the gate of No. 1517 Milton Street.

"Just as we drove up we saw a physician coming down the walk with his medicine-case in his hand and a troubled look on his face. I accosted him politely, saying: 'Excuse me, Doctor, but you evidently have a very sick patient and a very *unusual* one.'

"'Why—er—y-e-s, I have,' he said; 'but why are you interested in the case?' and he looked us over critically and doubtfully.

"'I am Dr. Templeton Saunders, of Cincinnati, and this gentleman and lady are relatives of your strange patient in yonder house,' I replied, with deference and courtesy.

"'Oh! I beg pardon then, Dr. Saunders,' he said. 'I am glad to meet you. I have read several of your books and feel like an old friend on that account;' and he introduced himself as Dr. Belden Maywood.

"'Your strange patient has been under my care for about a year now, and about three weeks ago he gave us all the slip and disappeared,' I continued. 'It was thru his daughter *Elvie* that we accidentally found him here located at his mother's,' I ventured.

"'You sure know him,' smiled Dr. Maywood. 'He mysteriously disappeared from his home here at his mother's about eighteen years ago, and she always had faith that he lived and would return some day; so about a week ago he suddenly turned up and seemed greatly confused and complained of being very tired. She was delighted to see him again, and put him to bed, and she and the girl nursed him themselves. Mrs. Rogers wanted to send for a physician at once, but her son had a positive aversion to doctors and wouldn't hear to it at all. He declared he would be all right in a few days, when he had got rested and had relaxed.'

"'What kind of a turn has the case taken now, Doctor?' I asked my brother physician.

"'Why, he got hurt day before yesterday by a fall down the cellar stairs, and his skull is injured,' replied Dr. Maywood. 'There is considerable concussion, and I am not quite sure whether we will have to operate or not. Perhaps you had better step in and examine him right now, Dr. Saunders. I should like your opinion of the case, and it comes under your specialty anyway.'

"'Very well, Dr. Maywood, that may be best,' I said. 'But what kind of illusions has he now? Is he conscious, and does he recognize his mother and daughter, etc.?' I asked as a starter.

“ ‘Why—er—y-e-s, he is conscious at times and seems to know them all right, but he has an idea that some woman is trying to steal his girl—Elvie,’ answered Dr. Maywood.

“ ‘Was he ever married before he disappeared, and is this girl Elvie the only issue of that marriage?’ I asked.

“ ‘Why, it seems so, but his mother is not sure on that point, and *Ruldon* won’t discuss it at all—he says it is nobody’s business; so the case is shrouded in considerable mystery,’ said Dr. Maywood.

“ ‘Has he ever mentioned my name or spoken of any other wife or children?’ I asked.

“ ‘Not to me,’ he replied. ‘I don’t know what all he has told his mother and dauter. You say these people here are his relatives?’ and he looked at Mr. Vangive and Velcie.

“ ‘Yes; this gentleman is Mr. Vangive, of Cincinnati, and the lady is Mrs. Jack Curtis, of St. Louis,’ I said.

“ ‘I introduced them easily and they acknowledged the introductions courteously; and I could see that Dr. Maywood was astonished at Velcie’s rare beauty and quiet dignity.

“ ‘Excuse me, Dr. Maywood, but does your patient ever mention the name of the woman who is trying to steal his dauter?’ Velcie asked.

“ ‘Why—er—n-o, I don’t remember that he ever did,’ he replied. ‘He said he took the child away from her once, but the girl says this is not true. The fact is, madam, Mr. Rogers’ mind is badly muddled and he has many hallucinations;’ and he looked at Velcie wonderingly—that is, he was wondering what relation she bore to Ruldon Rogers. ‘Could it be possible,’ mused Dr. Maywood to himself, ‘that she is his wife?’

“ ‘Then Dr. Maywood led the way back to the house and introduced us to Mrs. Rogers and Miss Elvie Myston Rogers. Mrs. Rogers was a rather tall and stately woman of about sixty, but she looked much younger; she was educated and refined in all her ways. The girl was a well-bred and cultured young girl, just a little past twenty, and the resemblance she bore to her father was unmistakable; like him, she was a musical genius, and also a talented artist and elocutionist.

“ ‘Mrs. Rogers,’ said Dr. Maywood, ‘I met Dr. Saunders at the gate as I was going out, and as he is a very high authority on mental and nervous ailments, I asked him to come in and examine your son. Perhaps he can throw some light on the case.’

“‘I am so glad you came in, Dr. Saunders,’ said Mrs. Rogers, ‘for if anything can be done for my poor boy, I want it done;’ and she gave me a grateful look and extended her hand.

“‘And oh, Dr. Saunders!’ exclaimed Elvie, ‘you and Dr. Maywood just must save my poor father, for it would be awful to lose him so soon after finding him again;’ and she looked at us both with a forlorn hope in her pretty brown eyes.

“‘We shall certainly do all we can for him,’ I replied; and Dr. Maywood nodded his assent.

“Just then Elvie left us and went to her father’s room and soon came back and announced that he wanted to know who the visitors were. ‘I told him they were Dr. Saunders, Mr. Vangive, and Mrs. Curtis, but he only frowned and said: “I don’t know them. What do they want anyway?”’ and he frowned again and seemed in deep thought,’ said the girl in a puzzled way.

“Mr. Vangive and I exchanged glances, and Dr. Maywood noted it with growing curiosity.

“‘Dr. Maywood, I want to confer with you alone a few minutes before seeing our patient,’ I said.

“‘You can go in the library there,’ pointed out Mrs. Rogers; and we were soon alone and the door closed.

“‘Dr. Maywood,’ said I, ‘I don’t think it best for me to see him at present; besides, I want to have a long talk with his mother first; so, if you will leave me your card, I will call on you to-morrow for another consultation.’

“‘Very well, Dr. Saunders,’ replied Dr. Maywood. ‘But what relation is the beautiful Mrs. Curtis to him?’ and Dr. Maywood’s eyes sparkled as if he had been drinking moonshine dew.

“‘That I prefer to defer till to-morrow, Doctor,’ said I kindly.

“‘Very well, then,’ said Dr. Maywood. ‘I shall expect you at 11 o’clock to-morrow.’

“‘And I will be there and may have something to tell you that will make you hair curl,’ said I mysteriously.

“Then Dr. Maywood took his departure, after making a very low obeisance to Velcie.

“‘Mrs. Rogers,’ I said, ‘I want to interview you alone; and if Miss Elvie will go and remain with her father, we can talk right here.’

“‘Very well, Doctor,’ said Mrs. Rogers. ‘Elvie, you go and stay with your father till I call you.’

“‘All right, grandma,’ replied Elvie. ‘I hope the Doctor can soon have papa well again, so he can play and sing for us.’

“With a look of hope and trust in her beautiful dancing eyes, Elvie was off to her father’s chamber.”

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. ROGERS’ STORY.

“‘Dr. Saunders, will you please explain the relationship between your friends here and my son Ruldon?’ asked Mrs. Rogers.

“‘I presume that will be best, Doctor,’ said Velcie sadly.

“‘Mrs. Curtis here is your son’s *wife*, and Mr. Vangive is your son’s father-in-law,’ said I as kindly as I could; but I could see that my words cut like a sharp knife.

“‘Is it possible?’ returned Mrs. Rogers. ‘But how is it that her name is Curtis? Has she married again?’ and she looked poor Velcie over critically.

“‘Yes, she married again when Ruldon deserted her and their little dauter, Luvele; but she married your son again under the name of Jack Curtis,’ I explained. ‘The first marriage to him was under the name of Dr. Ralph Holmes.’

“‘Heavens, Doctor!’ exclaimed Mrs. Rogers. ‘But I have feared that Ruldon’s mind has not been just right ever since he traveled with that hypnotist, Professor Sengally. He traveled with that awful man for two years as one of his subjects and was nightly under the hypnotic spell and did all sorts of ridiculous stunts for the edification of his audiences, and I have feared that it left him unbalanced;’ and she tried hard to stifle a sob and swallow something in her proud old throat that refused to go down.

“‘Undoubtedly, madam. And he also married Mr. Vangive’s dauter under the name of La Salle Verndon,’ I continued; for I knew it all had to come out and the sooner we had it over with the better.

“‘Mercy, Doctor! Oh, my poor boy! My dear Ruldon!’ sobbed Mrs. Rogers; and the tears just gushed like an Oklahoma oil well.

“‘There, there, mother; bear up,’ soothed Velcie. ‘It can’t be helped. We are all your friends and have come to help him, if we can. I love him just as you do, only more so, for he has been all the world to me under two distinct identities, and he is the father of our only child. And Loree, his wife under the identity of La Salle Verndon, is just as fond of him, and they have the dearest little

boy in all the world; and our mutual sorrow has made her and me real sisters, and we love each other and each other's children. I want to be a real dauter to you, Mother Rogers, and I will help you and Elvie nurse him.'

"Velcie had both arms around the elder woman, and the two were weeping together in their mutual sorrow.

" 'I am so glad you have come, dauter, for we need you all,' said Mrs. Rogers. 'But I am afraid we can't do much for the poor boy—can we, Doctor?'

" 'There is no hope whatever, Mrs. Rogers,' I answered. 'All we can do is to care for him and prevent him from escaping and wandering away again—back to some of his other identities. I have had him under close observation for a year now, and I feel sure there is no hope of his ever regaining his mental balance. How old was he when he traveled with the hypnotist?'

" 'About fifteen or sixteen, I think,' replied Mrs. Rogers. 'When the hypnotist was killed in Virginia, he came home and seemed all upset and muddled mentally. He got work in an office down town for a few months, and then he worked with the theater people at one of the theaters; and as he had such wonderful musical talents and powers of mimicry, he climbed up rapidly in that profession. He went out on the road with some strolling troubadours for awhile, and then returned home again and announced his intention of becoming a doctor. He evidently got this idea from the hypnotist, for that was one of the professor's favorite characters he had Ruldon impersonate when in the hypnotic state.'

" 'Excuse me, Mother Rogers,' I broke in, 'but wasn't it Dr. Holmes he had Ruldon impersonate?'

" 'Why, bless me, so it was—the great Dr. Holmes. Now I recall my son telling me so,' she said. 'No doubt that is where he got the idea of becoming a doctor;' and she looked at me curiously.

" 'Well, did he attend medical college?' I asked anxiously.

" 'Oh, yes!' she replied. 'He entered Johns Hopkins University, and after three years graduated with high honors, but *as Dr. Holmes*. I did not know that he was matriculated under that name and never realized it till we went to see him graduate, and he then explained that he was known there as Ralph E. Holmes. I was surprised and shocked, and demanded to know why he had assumed another name, and he just looked confused and said he didn't know why. "I just had to take that name," he said, and that was all

we could get out of him. After he graduated—about three weeks, I should say—he came home one evening looking very tired and ghostly, and had a little girl baby in his arms, and said: “Mother, I have brought you a dauter—little *Elvie* is her name, and I want you to take care of her and bring her up for me,” and he handed the bundle to me and sank in a chair and covered his face with his hands and just moaned. I unwrapped the shawl, and there all in white was the most beautiful little girl I had ever seen, and she just smiled up at me and cooed like a little dove. My heart opened up to the little waif at once, and I squeezed her to my heart, and began to sing and coo to her in turn. “Why, Ruldon!” I exclaimed. “Where did you get her? Is she your *own* dauter? And where is her mother?” “Yes, mother, she is my own child, and—and her mother is d-dead,” he said. “When and how did she die?” I asked; but he just shook his head and sighed. “My son, you must tell me all about this,” I demanded, rather harshly; but he only moaned and shook his head. “How old is the child?” I persisted; and he said, “About fourteen months.” Then he got up and went to his room and refused to see me or to eat supper; he said he was tired and wanted to rest. The next morning I went to call him, and his room was empty—he was gone; and I never heard a word from him for about fifteen years—until he walked in on us about eight days ago. There, Doctor, you have my story, and it is a sad one, too.’

“‘One more question, Mrs. Rogers,’ I said. ‘Did *you* ever attend a hypnotic performance or study the subject during your period of gestation?’

“‘Why—er—y-e-s, I did,’ answered Mrs. Rogers. ‘My husband, Captain Sidney Taylor Rogers, and I were in New Orleans on our wedding trip; and as the whole town was stirred from bottom to top over the strange and uncanny things people did every night down at the Crescent Theater, we attended one night, and I was peculiarly affected by the strange phenomena and bought a book on the subject and read it several times with a strange fascination; then when we reached New York on our return, I secured two more books on the same subject, and did little else than read the gruesome things and dream of it in my sleep nearly every night. My husband carried the books away with him, for he feared my mind was becoming unsettled on the subject.’

“‘I thank you, madam,’ I said. ‘Now, I have the whole case untangled. It is a peculiar case of memralj, brought on by too

much hypnosis and by pre-natal influence. There is absolutely nothing to be done; and unless the skull is fractured and pressing on the brain, an operation would be useless. After a subject is under the hypnotic spell for awhile, the brain conditions are so changed he just goes into these hypnotic states automatically and has no control of himself nor of his actions. Each state of hypnosis controls absolutely while it lasts and blots out all other memories—in fact, produces complete amnesia,’ I carefully explained to them all.

“‘Mrs. Rogers, do you recall whether your son ever had any trouble with any of the other students while he was at school?’ I then asked.

“‘Why—er—I hardly know,’ she answered. ‘He came home one evening with his face scratched and bruised and one eye slightly discolored, but said he and one of the fellows got to scuffling and scratched one another a little. He seemed averse to discussing the matter, and I did not press him further.’

“‘Did he ever mention a student by the name of Saunders?’ I inquired.

“‘Yes, he did—on two occasions,’ said Mrs. Rogers. ‘He said he was going to lick that fellow when school was out, but feared he would be expelled for fighting.’

“‘Now I understand his reference to Harold,’ I explained to Velcie and Mr. Vangive. ‘It seems certain it was my son Harold with whom he quarreled and fought, and it is my guess that both young men were suitors for my son’s wife—then Milvern Hastings—and it was over her they quarreled;’ and I felt that another mystery was solved.

“‘Did you say her name was *Milvern Hastings*?’ excitedly asked Mrs. Rogers. ‘Why, we knew that family, and Milvern and Ruldon grew up as nabors and went thru high school together, and I am certain that my son always fancied Milvern; I remember that on one occasion he whipped a boy for throwing snow down her neck; so it is more than likely that your boy and mine were both sweet on little Milvern Hastings, and as your son was the successful one, that explains why Ruldon quit going to see her and even ceased to mention her name,’ added Mrs. Rogers, with interest.

“‘This explains my granddaughter’s strange fascination for your son, Mrs. Rogers, and why she often meets him in her dreams, etc.,’ I said. ‘Her mother, my son’s wife, most likely was your son’s boyhood sweetheart and it would be natural for her to think of him and

dream of him more or less after her marriage to my son, and in that way she marked her dauter—my Velden; and as your son's most striking talent is his musical genius, the child would most likely be marked in that respect,' I exclaimed, with a relieved feeling.

"‘Wonderful, Doctor! Wonderful!’ was all Mr. Vangive could think to say.

"‘Yes, he certainly knows how to trace effects back to their cause,’ added Velcie, with admiration in her wonderful eyes.

"Just then Elvie came in and announced that her father was sleeping. We explained who and what we were and most of the facts in regard to her father's strange malady, and when I assured her that we had no hope for his recovery, her grief was pitiable. Velcie took Elvie in her magnetic arms and tried to pacify her, but only partially succeeded. However, Elvie took a great fancy to Velcie, and soon the two were staunch friends.

"‘Just to think, dear, you and my little dauter Luvele are *sisters* and I am your *stepmother*!’” and Velcie again gathered the heart-broken girl to her heart and loved and mothered her like her own mother might have done; and Elvie just sobbed and softly cried like a mere child, instead of a girl of twenty. It was a pathetic sight, and all our eyes leaked a little.

"‘And you also have a little *brother*—our little Rambert,’ added Mr. Vangive.

"‘Oh! where is he?’ exclaimed Elvie with joy, for she had always wanted a brother to play with.

"‘We left him and both little girls back in Cincinnati with my dauter, Loree,’ explained Mr. Vangive.

"‘I saw that he had said just a little too much, and Mrs. Rogers picked it up immediately.

"‘Oh! I thot you only had *one* dauter by my son, Mrs. Curtis,’ she said.

"‘That’s all; but your son had yet another wife before we met him—the *first* Mrs. Curtis, you see, and he has a dauter by that marriage; *Ulda* is her name, and she is a sweet and beautiful child and looks just like her father, and she also has his wonderful musical talent,’ explained Velcie.

"‘And where is that wife?’ asked Mrs. Rogers, with a determination to have it all over with at once.

"‘He told us she died as a result of injuries in the theater in

St. Louis, and as the other actors and actresses bear him out in this, we have no reason to doubt it,' said Velcie finally.

"‘Oh, grandma! I will now have *two* sisters and a *brother*—just think of it, grandma!’ exclaimed Elvie, and she danced about in great joy in honor of the event.

"‘How old is *Ulda*?’ asked Elvie, and she came over and wound her pretty white arms around Velcie’s neck and kissed her.

"‘Just about your age, dear—a year younger, I believe,’ replied Velcie; and she returned the girl’s caress and added to it.

"Just then we were all surprised to see Ruldon standing in the doorway and observing us all with a strange light in his uncanny eyes. I motioned to the others to keep silent and let him speak first. He just stared like one in a somnambulant dream—and especially at Velcie and Elvie. Velcie returned his look with a longing in her beautiful eyes that no one but a madman could have resisted. After a few minutes, he turned to his mother and sarcastically asked: ‘Mother, whom have we the honor of entertaining to-day?’ and he gave us all a withering look of contempt.

"‘My dear son, these are relatives and friends of yours from Cincinnati, and surely you recognize your wife there,’ answered Mrs. Rogers; and she pointed to Velcie with a look of entreaty in her proud old eyes.

"‘Relatives, nothing!’ exclaimed Ruldon. ‘I never saw them before. They are impostors. Away with them!’ and he glared at first one and then the other in turn. When he came to Velcie, he shook his finger in her face and exclaimed: ‘I believe you are the same woman who tried to steal my Elvie from me—now aren’t you?’

"‘Why, no, Ralph dear; I am your wife, Velcie. Don’t you remember me and our little dauter, Luvele?’ replied Velcie, and she tried to put her arms around his neck.

"Ruldon side-stepped her, and fired back: ‘Indeed, you are not my wife; and Elvie here is my only child, and her mother died when she was only a baby;’ and he circled his arms around his dauter and drew her away, as tho some harm threatened the girl.

"‘Surely you know me, La Salle?’ said Mr. Vangive, and he rose and offered his hand and smiled like a father greeting a long-lost son.

"‘I never saw you before, sir,’ replied Ruldon; ‘and I can’t imagine why you came here to bother me—and when I am sick, too.’

“‘Of course you remember me, Jack, old bod,’ said I, and I slapped him on the back and luffed heartily. ‘I am Dr. Saunders, of Cincinnati.’

“‘No, I can’t recall you, either,’ said Ruldon; ‘but that damned name Saunders has a familiar sound; but it couldn’t be you, sir, for he was a year my junior;’ and he looked troubled and puzzled.

“‘That was my son Harold that went to Johns Hopkins the same time you did, and you fought over Milvern Hastings,’ said I as a reminder of the event I felt sure took place.

“‘Oh, yes! yes, so we did, and I licked him; but he got the girl. Ha, ha!’ and he luffed immoderately. ‘But it has almost slipped my memory. And he was your son? Fine young fellow; but he did like the girls.’

“‘Now you remember me, La Salle?’ I persisted; but he denied ever having met me before. ‘Surely you remember Loree and your son, Rambert?’ I shot back at him; but it was no use—he could not recall such parties, and stuck to it that he never had but one wife, Elvie’s mother, and she was dead.

“‘Well, my dear boy, Dr. Maywood brought me in to see you, and we are your friends anyway, and only want to help you get well,’ said I soothingly.

“‘I thank you for that, Doctor,’ said Ruldon; ‘but I fear this woman here (pointing to Velcie) wants to steal my dauter;’ and he gave Velcie a look that boded her no good.

“‘No, no, Ruldon! she has no such intentions,’ declared his mother soothingly.

“‘Oh, no, papa! She and I love each other already, and we are just going to be the best of friends, aren’t we, *mamma*?’

“‘To be sure we are, Mr. Rogers,’ said Velcie; and she took Elvie in her arms and sheltered her like an old hen does her chicks when danger threatens; and the girl just clung to Velcie as tho she were her own mother.

“‘Very well, then; if you won’t steal my Elvie, you are welcome here,’ said Ruldon; and he turned and went back to his room and lay down again.

“‘I am afraid your prognosis is only too accurate, Doctor,’ said the heart-broken Mrs. Rogers; and then she tried to hide the truant tears.

“‘Oh, Dr. Saunders! can’t papa ever get well again?’ cried Elvie in alarm; and then, as I shook my head in the negative, she just

nestled deeper in Velcie's loving arms and sobbed as though her young heart would break.

"In about an hour we heard a deep groan from the sick-chamber and hurried thither, and found Ruldon unconscious. His head was hanging over the side of the bed and his nose bleeding copiously. I hurriedly lifted him back to a proper position and felt his wrist, but could find very little pulse and it was intermittent—a sort of jerky and skip-a-beat kind. We summoned Dr. Maywood, more as a matter of ethics than anything else. In about an hour he arrived and looked worried.

"How is he?" he asked on meeting me at the door.

"Unconscious, and nearing the end," I whispered, so the others could not hear it.

"That is what I feared," he commented briefly. "No need of an operation then?" he asked me.

"None whatever," I assured him. "However, he may linger a week or longer in a semi-comatose condition. Did you know, Dr. Maywood, that Mr. Rogers is a subject of hypnosis—that when a boy he traveled with Professor Sengally for two years and was nightly put to sleep by the professor?" I asked.

"No, I was not aware of that fact, Dr. Saunders," replied Dr. Maywood.

"That being the case, he may linger in the trance or hypnotic state for quite a while before he dies," I explained to my brother physician. "However, he may have brief returns to consciousness, but the *subconscious* mind is now in full control and will remain supreme to the end," I continued.

"I had not heard of that phase of the subject, Doctor," said Dr. Maywood, and he looked puzzled.

"It is a subject little understood by our profession, and I have only recently brought to light a few facts bearing on the subject," I replied.

"I thank you, Doctor, for the light you are throwing on the case," said Dr. Maywood.

"Then we went in, and Dr. Maywood made a cursory examination and corroborated my diagnosis and also my prognosis. After a brief consultation, Mr. Vangive wired Loree to come at once and bring the children."

CHAPTER XV.

THE PASSING OF A STRANGE SOUL.

"In two days Loree arrived with the three children, and after a good night's rest we carried them all out to the little cottage on Milton Street and introduced them to Mrs. Rogers and Elvie," continued Dr. Saunders. "Mrs. Rogers and Elvie received them like long-lost relatives, and soon Elvie and the kids were great friends and played together all they could under the circumstances. The children were not allowed to see their father, on account of the psychological effect it would leave on their tender minds, but Loree and Velcie were in constant attendance at his bedside. This was a great relief to Mrs. Rogers, for she and Elvie were worn out nursing and watching him for any signs of returning consciousness. I had ordered that some one must be with him every minute, for he might come back any time, and furthermore he might resume any of his other identities, so in that event the right ones would be on hand to greet him. Loree, Velcie, and the children all remained at the Rogers cottage all the time, while Mr. Vangive and I slept in our rooms down town. We were to be summoned immediately if anything unusual occurred.

"Dr. Maywood saw that he could do nothing and suggested that he would turn the case over to me entirely. I agreed to this, and told him that if we really needed him, we would summon him; so it was arranged, and we settled down to await the end.

"On the fourth day of Ruldon's trance he awoke suddenly, while Loree was at his bedside, and exclaimed wildly: 'Oh, Elvie, my child! where are you?' Then he saw Loree, and gasped: 'Who are you? What have you done with my child?' and his uncanny eyes fairly burned holes thru his wife.

"'Why, La Salle dear, don't you know me—your own wife, Loree?' and she took his feverish hand in her trembling hand and tried to clasp it lovingly, but he jerked it away from her as tho she were a poisonous serpent.

"'Of course I don't know you. I never saw you before. Where is my dauter, Elvie?' he asked, and continued to glare at her.

"'Very well, dear,' said Loree. 'Just be quiet and I will call Elvie; she is out in the yard playing with *Rambert*, *Luvele*, and *Ulda*,' and she looked straight in his burning eyes to see if he would recognize any of their names; but he only moaned for Elvie.

"Loree soon returned with Elvie, and Ruldon clasped her in his arms and moaned pitifully. Loree told Elvie to remain with him and to call them if she needed any of them. In about an hour Elvie came out with a white face and announced that her father had just closed his eyes and seemed to have slipped off into slumber again.

"Ruldon was again unconscious, and it was Velcie's turn to watch by his side. He just sank deeper and deeper into the trance-like sleep, and his face relaxed into a happy and peaceful smile. Once during the night he stirred uneasily and moaned a few times and gasped out: 'Damn Harold Saun—Saun—! I licked him, but he—he —' and that was as far as he ever got.

"Velcie reported this to me the next day when I called, and I told her that he might utter broken sentences or just incoherent words at intervals, but it signified nothing—just a few old scars on the subconscious mind trying to break out.

"Velcie was relieved by Loree, and then Elvie and Mrs. Rogers took their turn at watching the patient, except when Mr. Vangive and I performed that function—vigiling a *four-windowed soul* as it was drifting into the Great Voiceless Beyond.

"On the sixth day Ruldon briefly returned to consciousness and asked for water; after quenching his thirst, he asked for the time and wanted his banjo. He was told that it was 4:20 in the afternoon, but he declared it could not be that late. Elvie happened to be with him at the time, and got his banjo and handed it to him. He tuned it up and turned himself loose for nearly an hour and also sang several old songs, and then asked for his mother. When she came and asked, 'Well, my boy, you are better to-day. What do you want for supper?' and patted his abundant brown hair, he looked at her silently for nearly a minute and then replied, 'Why, mother dear, I think a whippoorwill stuffed with mulberries and chocolate ice cream would be fine;' then he reached for his instrument again, but his eyes drooped shut, and he relapsed into the comatose state again. The poor old mother clung to his hand and wept and cried as tho her last star had set forever.

"Ruldon remained in the out-drifting dreamland till nearly 11 o'clock the next day, when he moaned uneasily and turned over several times, and then his eyes snapped wide open, and he muttered the one word, 'Water!' Velcie was with him, but he did not notice who it was. She gave him the water and he drank nearly two glasses ravenously, and sighed, 'I am better now;' then he

turned over and faced the wall, and slept again as before. He slept on, only his breathing was slower and his heart-beats were scarcely discernible.

"When Loree came to relieve Velcie at 7 o'clock that night, Velcie refused to leave him; so they both watched by his side, for they felt that the end was near. At thirteen minutes to 12 o'clock that night the strange *Four-windowed Soul* left its earthly tenement and silently accompanied old Charon across the Shoreless River.

"They quietly summoned Mrs. Rogers and Elvie, but they did not awake the children. Mrs. Rogers and Elvie came quickly, and when the old mother saw that her boy had passed on for ever, she quietly knelt down by the bedside and between her two daughters-in-law, and, with Elvie clinging to Velcie, they all silently bowed their heads and uttered a silent and wordless prayer. Thus ended, my boy, the strangest tragedy in human annals.

"Velcie hurried to our apartments and broke the news to Mr. Vangive and myself, and we hurried to the Rogers cottage and viewed the corpse.

"Before starting, we summoned Dr. Maywood and he arrived about an hour later. Of course, there was nothing for him to do except to look at the dead body and make out the burial permit. 'Apoplexy' I suggested would look best in the death certificate, and he agreed with me; in fact, Dr. Maywood knew little about the history of the case, as Mrs. Rogers felt a delicacy about telling him the whole story, and we all agreed that it was not necessary anyway; so 'apoplexy' it was, and the public never knew.

"Ruldon Rogers was quietly buried in the family lot two days later, and thus the Strange Case terminated.

"Mrs. Rogers and Elvie were inconsolable and begged us all to remain with them awhile, so we prolonged our stay about ten days, and then Mr. Vangive, Loree, Ulda, Rambert, and I returned to Cincinnati. Loree and the two children kept house for Mr. Vangive, and the children grew up together and were inseparable. When Ulda had completed her education at twenty-one years of age, she returned to the stage, and soon reached the very top as a star of the first magnitude.

"Mrs. Rogers and Elvie would not let Velcie and Luvele leave at all, so they remained there and lived with them; and it was a beautiful and touching sight to see the love and devotion between

them all; and Elvie always called Velcie her 'mamma' and little Luvele her *sister*.

"The poor old mother never recovered from the awful blow, and after about two years and three months she died of a broken heart and followed her strange and talented son to the Great Beyond—if there be such a place.

"Velcie now took her place at the head of the family, and reared and carefully educated both girls; and about two years after the death of Mrs. Rogers, Velcie permitted Dr. Belden Maywood to lead her to the altar; and all the papers united in saying she was the most beautiful and charming bride ever seen in Baltimore—"and they were right," admitted the lucky doctor to his friends and myself. I persuaded them to come to Cincinnati on their wedding trip, as Loree and Rambert were crazy to see Luvele, and she was just as anxious to see them and play with her little brother again. It was a happy family reunion, my boy, and I would not have missed it for the world."

"What became of Elvie, Doctor?" asked Kumdon, with interest.

"A few years later she made a brilliant marriage, and went to Richmond to live," replied the Doctor.

"I thank you, Doctor," said Kumdon. "It is a most wonderful story; and won't they all sit up and blink when they read it next Sunday—or rather, the beginning of it next Sunday? It will run as a serial and continue thru several issues."

"Go to it, my boy, go to it; and use plenty of pigment," said Dr. Saunders. "Now we will go down and have a glass of champagne before you depart; and perhaps Velden is waiting to give you another swipe with her tongue," continued the Doctor, and he smiled at the thought of it.

"That child sure has some sharp tongue all right, Doctor," replied Kumdon; "but she is a genius and as bright as they make them. I am proud to know her."

"I thank you, my boy," said the Doctor. "She is all we have left, and, of course, she is badly spoiled."

"And that is the way you treat me, Kumdon—spending the whole evening up there listening to grampum's ghastly old yarns?" and Velden pretended to be mortally offended.

"Of course, I would much prefer being down here in such excellent company, but your distinguished grandsire has just furnished me with the data for a wonderful story, and I know you will

be glad when you realize what a big hit it will make," said Kumdon; and he looked at Velden in an apologetic way.

"Well, Mr. GREAT Reporter, I will forgive you this time, but never again;" and Velden's pretty eyes snapped like jiggered lightning on a spree.

Kumdon did not wait long and insisted that it was too late for any music, but promised to do better next time; so he bade Velden good-night and skiddooed into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORY.

The story made a profound sensation in all circles, and the medical fraternity sharply criticised Dr. Saunders for keeping such a wonderful and unheard-of case under his hat. "Why didn't he write it up for the medical magazines and thus let us all in on it?" asked thousands of the doctors all over the world. Kumdon became a lion everywhere, and could not begin to fill the invitations from prominent people to dine with them. His name was presented to all the clubs and he was in demand everywhere. Several New York papers offered him all kinds of inducements to come and take a place on their staffs, but he modestly declined them all, and devoted himself to the *Daily Bull* that had given him his first job. His paper advised him to publish the story in book form along with a number of his best short stories and sketches. He did this and millions of copies were sold, and he soon became famous as a popular author, and did not know what to do with the money that poured in from the royalties. The *Daily Bull* also raised his salary to \$300 a month; so he was a very proud and happy boy.

Kumdon helped his parents and near kinfolds back in West Virginia and made several wise investments, and he had one of the niftiest boats built that ever chugged the waters of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. This he presented to his good friend, Captain Stephens. The Captain protested against accepting it as a gift on his birthday, but Kumdon and Yulvern were inexorable, and the kind old Captain had to yield and accept the new boat, and maybe he wasn't proud of it! It was the belle of both the rivers, and all the old rivermen were envious of the Captain's good luck. "It all comes, gentlemen, of being kind to a poor boy at a time when he needed a helping hand and a kind smile," he told a bunch of them at the Burnett House one evening. "Many a man would have

thrown him off at the first landing and thot no more about it; but there is something in me that always wants to shy a crust to every stray dog I meet."

Kumdon now made up his mind to forget his little fl'rtation with Velden^s and stick to his first love—Yulvern; and oh, how happy she was when she noticed how attentive and devoted her lover was! He never went any place without taking her along; and soon after her graduation they were quietly married on the new boat just as it was leaving the wharf at Cincinnati.

They went up to Wheeling and spent part of their honeymoon visiting Kumdon's relatives and boyhood friends; then they went on to a place Kumdon had long wanted to see—dear old crooked-street Boston, and while there paid Kumdon's old friend, Monsieur Vallos, the artist, a visit; then they stopped off at New York and paid Kumdon's publishers a brief visit, and then home *via* Washington and Baltimore, back to Wheeling, where they connected with the Captain and his new boat, *The Moonbeam*, and drifted back down the dear old river to a dear little vine-tangled bungalow of their own. Here Kumdon and Yulvern lived an ideal and happy life, and the boy climbed to yet greater heights.

They raised two beautiful and talented children—a girl and a boy. Kumdon wanted to name the girl *Velden*, but Yulvern 'lowed that *Velcie Ulda* would be prettier, and so it was as she wished. They named the boy *Varius Bentley Spry* and he grew up to be even spryer than his distinguishd name.

THE END.

THE END OF A LONG TRAIL

— O R —

DID HE WIN THE CASE?

CHAPTER I.

About ten miles up the Red River in western Louisiana is one of the biggest and most picturesque plantations in all the *Southland*. It is famed for its broad acres, rich soil, profusion of fruit trees and flowers, and the hospitality of its master—old Jerome Lambert Hopkins, the last of a famed and aristocratic old Southern family, rich in ancestry and traditions. Colonel Hopkins was a tall and picturesque old gentleman of the old school, and had won his laurels on the field of battle, in the halls of Congress, and in the business and social worlds. He was a man of wide experience and broad and liberal education—ready to fight at a moment's notice, but generous and kind-hearted. To be a guest of the Hopkins family and enjoy their unfailing hospitality was an honor sought by all classes.

Both the Colonel and his wife came from a long line of wealthy and aristocratic people and were by every instinct of heredity, education, and environment exclusive and independent; and yet the Colonel was the very soul of democracy and good-comradeship to those whom he considered his equals or worthy of his hospitality. The Colonel proudly traced his genealogical tree back to a long line of fearless Kentuckians and cultured and distinguished Virginians. Mrs. Hopkins came from a wealthy old Creole family of New Orleans and her people originally came to Louisiana from Montreal and La Belle France. The married life of the Colonel and Mrs. Hopkins had always been happy and prosperous, and there had never been a stain on the proud old family escutcheon.

Their first-born was a son, Jerrold Jofton Hopkins, and he was indeed a promising youngster, and he grew to young manhood amidst a lazy and indolent atmosphere of wealth, culture, and ease. He had, of course, been given every educational advantage, and learned rapidly. He passed thru college and graduated with the highest honors.

The second child was a beautiful dauter, Fannetta Moss Hopkins, and she was just two years younger than her brother Jerrold. She grew up amidst the same surroundings and the same soft and

indolent atmosphere pervaded her blood and played hooky with her soul, but she was quite different from her brother. She was dark and Latin-hued like her mother's people, but her nature was deep and loyal. Whatever she said with her eyes or lips was endorsed by her heart. She had a sweet, quiet, girlish dignity about her that rendered her very charming and irresistible. Of course, she was widely sought after everywhere she was known; but it seemed that the "*right one*" had not yet materialized.

Of course, her mother had several desirables picked out for Fannetta, but the Colonel said: "Oh, mother! let the child pick her own mate. She is a better judge of what she wants than you can possibly be."

"Very true, my dear," replied Mrs. Hopkins; "but a girl of Fannetta's age needs a great deal of guidance. Youngsters are so impulsive and so likely to err, you know."

"Yes, and so are *we* likely to err, as thousands of others have done," continued the Colonel. "Fannetta is not fickle nor foolish, and I feel sure she has good judgment in such matters. Her heart and mind will both guide her, no doubt, so don't worry about the child; just let her alone and she'll come thru all right."

As the Colonel had the strongest mind and will, his ideas prevailed, and Fannetta was permitted to choose her own company. Of course, the Colonel knew the history and reputation of every young man in their social set, and he was too good a judge of human nature to try to coerce his daughter into marrying a man whom he or Mrs. Hopkins might select.

"Now, mother, you know that I just couldn't think of marrying Mr. Fasden," said Fannetta. "No doubt he is all right and a very desirable catch for any girl, but—"

"But *what?*" persisted her mother.

"Well, I just don't *know*—only my *heart* could never *pal* with him," returned Fannetta. "There is a scar somewhere away back in his primeval soul that makes his ideas crooked, and—and—well, I just know I could never *trust* him, so please don't try to make me like him, mamma;" and she wound her pretty white arms around her mother's proud old neck and kissed her into forgetfulness.

Jerrold was a free rover when it came to playing the heart game. He was a natural flirt; in fact, he considered every good-looking girl his legitimate prey—just as a hunter does every bird that is careless enough to be flying *too* low. At the time I write

Jerrold was just past his twentieth birthday and Fannetta was just leaving her eighteenth milestone behind.

Jerrold had already had two rather serious *calico* affairs while at college and in one of them his inamorata was a young married woman; but they all looked *alike* to Jerrold. It cost the Colonel several thousand dollars to extract his son from these two little calico affairs; and on two occasions he came to his son's rescue just in time to save the young cuss from being expelled from college—on account of poker obligations and a few other *I. O. U.s* signed by the Hopkins heir-apparent.

The Colonel made desperate efforts to keep all this from La Vesta, his wife, but there are always people in every community who specialize in disseminating scandal; so Mrs. Hopkins always learned of all her son's disgraceful escapades.

"Yes, mother," said the Colonel, "the young scamp seems determined to bill himself straight thru to h—".

"Jerome!" exclaimed Mrs. Hopkins just in time. "Remember you are a deacon and in the presence of a lady."

"Excuse me, La Vesta, but I almost said *Halifax*," the Colonel explained.

"Yes, I know you did—only it would have been a much shorter and *hotter* one than the Halifax we know in Nova Scotia," replied Mrs. Hopkins; and she laughed and forgave his near breach of language with her glorious eyes—"eyes that age can never dim," the Colonel often told her, and he meant it, too..

When Jerrold returned from college at Louisville, Kentucky, he informed his parents that he had sown all his wild cereals and intended to settle down and amount to something, and thus perpetuate the old family name and traditions. The parents were very much elated at this good news, and the Colonel 'lowed it was almost too good to be true. However, he would hope for the best, and knew the old saying about the devil finding work for idle hands, etc.; so he decided to take the youngster in business with himself, and thus keep him busy and divert his mind from his old habits of women, wine, and song. Therefore, about two weeks after Jerrold's return from college, and after a big social party in honor of his graduation, he was sent to New Orleans by his father, on an important business affair. Colonel Hopkins had for nearly a year been negotiating with a New Orleans company for the purchase of a three-thousand-acre timber tract in Louisiana, but he and the company could never quite get together and close up the deal.

But now he felt sure that his highly educated son was just the one to send on to negotiate the deal and close up the sale. The Colonel signed blank checks for about seventy-five thousand dollars and gave them to his son to fill out and use in paying for the valuable timber land the elder Hopkins coveted.

Jerrold was all swelled up with the trust reposed in him and the compliment paid to his intelligence and business judgment. He left one morning early in August for the Crescent City and traveled on a small packet that plied the Red River and the Mississippi between Shreveport and New Orleans.

CHAPTER II.

A RIVER TRIP TO HEAVEN AND TO THE CRESCENT CITY.

The weather was ideal that August morning when Jerrold Hopkins bade his parents and sister good-bye on the little wharf at Shreveport, Louisiana, and started on his memorable trip to New Orleans to negotiate the sale of a valuable tract of timber land to his father. This was the first real piece of business the young man had ever attempted and he was particularly anxious to retrieve his past life by making good now, and thus becoming a real asset to his father. He had sown an awful lot of feral cereals while at college, and had been a big expense to his father. Here was a chance to make good and make "the Governor," as he termed his father, forget his son's disgraceful escapades at college; and these escapades had been a grievous blow to his sensitive and highbrow mother. "But now the slate will be wiped clean," mused the youngster to himself, as he watched the beloved old home town grow dim in the distance. "I will just show mater and pater that I am a real asset in spite of all I have cost them. But pshaw! Every young fellow that has red blood puts out a *cereal* crop while at college," is the way he let himself down easily. Sowing wild oats not only sticks the needle in the sower's fingers, but sometimes the scar extends to the soul and becomes a permanent part of one's nature.

Jerrold fully believed that now he was a full-fledged *man*, and just luffed at the idea of temptations having any influence over him. "Of course, when I was only a *kid* at college I was a little weak and foolish where *calico* was a factor in the game, but *now* I am a MAN and can put such trifling things behind me. I am just going to make the Governor so proud of his little boy that he 'll be in

for running me for Congress," he said to himself, and he indulged in many other pleasant reflections as the little steamer with its jack-rabbit smokestacks dreamily slipped through the muddy *red* water. He sat on the north side of the boat and smoked cigaret after cigaret and indulged in very laudable and roseate dreams.

After the noon-day luncheon, Jerrold tried to get interested in a novel, and declined several tentative invitations to sit-in a card game with other gentlemen. He knew what these friendly little card games "just to kill time" meant—playing for money later on, and he had promised his parents that he would not gamble nor frequent questionable places. His father had particularly warned him against professional card-sharps and blacklegs that traveled on the boats in various disguises of respectability—such as *ministers*, planters, senators, merchants, etc. "No, sir-ee! I am not going to be caught by any of them. Me for business and the straight and narrow path from now on," he mused, and he fully believed in himself and his ability to resist all temptations.

About 5 o'clock that afternoon the quaint old town of Alexandria, Louisiana, hove in sight, and the captain announced that the boat would stop forty-five minutes to load and unload freight, take on passengers, etc.

Jerrold went up town and laid in a fresh supply of grave weeds and several pounds of chocolate candy. He had a sweet tooth all right, and chocolates were his favorites—in more senses than candy.

About twenty passengers came aboard at Alexandria and most of them were for the Crescent City. Among the new arrivals was a particularly beautiful girl of dazzling and dusky brilliancy. She was a petite brunette about eighteen years old, and as trim and graceful as a gazelle. Her movements were languid and noiseless, like the black puma of Nicaragua. Her wonderful eyes were daintily and artistically veiled by long and graceful lashes; they were of a deep violet dusk and danced like the soft and languorous waves coming ashore on the Azores in August; they were those deep, dreamy, come-to-my-soul-forever eyes that lure men thru hell without any asbestos clothes on. And, oh, boy! the great bales of dark bronze hair that had the moonlight tangled in it. Her mouth was luscious and just big enuff for a man-trap. Her hands were small and dainty, but with the latent strength of a puma. She wore a No. 2 shoe, and possessed features that would break up an *artistic club* in the Latin Quarter in about three adult minutes.

Jerrold was seated right where he could see the incoming pas-

sengers, but they could not see him. "Jumping Jehosaphat! but isn't she a man-killer?" exclaimed Jerrold to himself, and his heart was already stepping on the gas with *both* feet. "Slow down there, old heart! Remember, no more *calico*!" he again exclaimed to himself, and he slapped his hand over his tumultuous heart facetiously, but his face was going some in the *Rainbow Class*.

He lighted a fresh coffin-nail and inserted it in the north-left corner of his mouth and sucked hard on it; at the same time he fed cream chocolates thru the other corner of his mouth, and tried to divert his thoughts to other subjects, but it was no go. His heart continued to step on the gas with all fours and his cheeks were playing dominoes with a California sunset. "Jerrold, old man, this will not do. If you don't come out of it, I will have the captain put you ashore at the next stop," he said to himself; and he sat there and pondered over this new problem until the boat had rounded a bend that shut out the view of Alexandria. Then he got up, threw his snipe overboard, and stretched himself like a Mississippi hound does when coming out of its siesta and looking for a shady place that the afternoon sun will not be able to find.

"Well, here goes to get acquainted with the '*man-killer*,'" continued Jerrold in a conversation with himself. "It won't do any harm to meet the divinity and be civil to her, and she may be going thru to New Orleans herself and will be as lonesome as the rest of *us*; so I will not be a cad and go off and sulk by myself, like an ascetic or a hermit—in fact, I didn't know that the blamed trip was going to be so long and *lonesome*;" and thus he placed another *Seeley mattress* for himself to light on. He lighted another coffin-hinge, and nonchalantly strolled about the small deck and then sauntered into the cabin, where nine ladies, four children, and eleven men were lounging around—some trying to entertain themselves with a book or magazine, while others were playing cards, and two of the young men were hovering over the piano and turning the music for a young lady who considered herself a musician. She was quite a pretty and attractive blonde, and could sing much better than she could play.

Several of the men knew Jerrold and spoke pleasantly to him. One of them was an elderly gentleman, who was a county judge and local politician of more or less power in the affairs of Shreveport. He had known Jerrold from childhood and had carefully noted his progress—in fact, the old Judge had a very attractive granddaughter whom he wished to see related to the Hopkins family

by marriage, and he would have been particularly pleased to have the Hopkins heir shine up to his granddauter.

" 'S matter, Jerrold, my boy?" laffed the old Judge as he wrung Jerrold's hand and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder in a fatherly way. "You seem terribly nervous, my boy. Too many of those blamed cemetery rivets. Here, smoke a *man's* weed!" and the Judge passed over his gold cigar-case, that was always well filled with real Havanas.

"Thanks, Judge," said Jerrold; "I believe I will try a cigar for a change. I am quite well, thank you; but I have not fully recovered from my over-study while at college. However, a few months' rest and quiet will put me back on the map at the right place."

Then Jerrold turned and went down to the piano and joined in the singing—more as an excuse for avoiding a conversation with the Judge. Jerrold was something of a musician himself and had a really fine tenor voice. At the conclusion of the song, Jerrold introduced himself to the young men, and one of them presented him to the blonde young lady who was playing. The four of them soon became well acquainted and sang several songs together, and then Jerrold played some and made a big hit.

The beautiful little brunette was nowhere to be seen and the boy's nervousness grew on him perceptibly. As he was about in mid-stream of a song that he was singing as a solo, a cabin door down near the rear of the room opened, and Elna quietly stepped out and slid into a seat and listened politely until Jerrold finished, and then she got up and quietly strolled out on the deck and was soon comfortably coiled up in a big steamer chair on the shady side of the boat. She at once buried her pretty face in a late novel and seemed oblivious to all mankind.

Jerrold soon lost all interest in the music and his new acquaintances. He went to his room and lay down and had a long and silent debate with himself, but—as usual, the *calico* won. "What difference does it make anyway?" he mused to himself. "If that fetchtaked old Judge wasn't aboard, I would be mightily pleased. *Why* do I want to throw him overboard without the benefit of clergy? *Why* do all my teeth itch when I see those young squirts looking at Elna with their souls in their eyes? In other words, Jerrold, old boy, *why* do our sex always make such fools of themselves over a pretty bit of georgette with a picot lace collar?" And thus

he tried to guy himself into a sane and reasonable mood—but a *debate* with the *heart* has always been more or less of a failure.

Jerrold got up and carefully readjusted his tie and put on a fresh collar, and then, with a novel in his hand, he came out yawning with *ennui*, and after a casual look around to be sure *she* had not returned to the cabin, he lazily sauntered out on the deck and strolled around on the shady side of the boat. “Ah, there she is!” he ejaculated to himself; and he reached for a chair that was near her and awkwardly stumbled and fell against her chair (which he did on purpose).

“Ah! I beg your pardon, miss, but it was so awkward of me to stumble the way I did. It is a little dark around here, but it was wholly due to my awkwardness.”

“Oh! to be sure, Mr. ——?”

“Hopkins—Jerrold Hopkins, of Shreveport, Louisiana.”

“My name is Elna Zuretta Kampion, m’sieu;” and she rose and made a quiet and just the proper obeisance and fully forgave him with her *eyes*.

“I’m sure it is more than kind of you, Miss Kampion, to overlook my awkwardness,” continued Jerrold; “but really, I am so glad to make your acquaintance, for I am bound for New Orleans, and it is so stupidly lonesome on these little *Red River* boats—unless one is fortunate enuff to meet with some congenial and adaptable people;” and he tried to swallow her at one gulp with his soul-hungry eyes.

“Really, Mr. Hopkins, I was getting dreadfully bored myself until you so kindly and thoughtfully *stumbled* over me,” rejoined Elna, and she gave him a *pal*-look that took all the thorns out of life’s path and left it carpeted with flowers and angel feathers for his tutored feet.

“I presume you are going thru to the Crescent City, Miss Kampion,” remarked Jerrold.

“Oh, yes; I have a married sister living there and I am on my way to visit her. I have just been visiting another sister in Shreveport,” returned Elna.

“Quite a dull old town, unless one is acquainted,” said Jerrold. “However, Shreveport has some splendid people;” and he rattled on in an effort to not let matters lag, now that he had *stumbled* in and broken the ice.

“Yes; I like Shreveport very much; and the next time I visit sister I intend to stay longer, and see if I can get acquainted with

some of the *live-wires* among *your* charming sex," said Elna; and she archly tossed him a smile that was plainly a challenge.

"May I be so inquisitive as to ask the name of your sister and what her husband does, if he is in business?" said Jerrold.

"Oh, to be sure! She is Mrs. Torren Smiley, and her husband is the manager of a big lumber company that has a chain of lumber yards thruout Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas," answered Elna; and she tossed another smile in his direction that burned her brand clear in on his *soul*.

"I have heard of him, of course, but I don't recall ever having met him personally," lied Jerrold like a gentleman. "I have just returned from college and, strictly speaking, *socially* I am hardly out yet, as mother would say," and he laffed at the irony of it.

"As you are just a college boy, Mr. Hopkins, I am afraid you need a chaperon," said Elna, with another ironical smile that cut in a way which felt *good*.

"No doubt of it, Miss Kampion," said Jerrold, "and I am just wondering if *you* wouldn't make a good chaperon for me—at least on this memorable trip to New Orleans;" and his blue-gray eyes were full of *soul*.

"Perhaps. But I warn you that I shall be dreadfully strict. I will not even let you sing any more with that beautiful and interesting blonde with whom you were singing this evening; and I shall make you say your *prayers* and go to bed promptly at 8 o'clock every night—unless—unless *I* feel inclined to remain up a little later. There! How does the prospect strike you, Mr. Hopkins?" and her eyes danced and revealed dangerous eddies in their hidden depths.

"Oh! I think that would be just ripping—splendid, I mean," answered Jerrold. "But I hope you will decide to remain up a little later than 8 o'clock, as it is almost nineteen minutes after that time now."

"So it is," said Elna, glancing at her wrist-watch. "Well, if you are a real good little boy and don't smoke any more *cemetery keys* to-night, I may let you stay out in care of the *moon* and myself till a quarter of 9 o'clock;" and she heaved a look over to him that any sailor or rookie would take for an *anchor*.

"Now, chaperon, I don't believe you could do much of a job of *spanking* with those dainty little hands," said Jerrold; and he timidly picked up one of her hands and proceeded to study it like an Egyptologist does a new hieroglyphic. As she did not object

to this initiatory procedure, he very gallantly carried it to his lips and plan ed (*his ancestors were all planters*) a sizzling soldier-boy kiss on it; then he politely returned it to her lap, where its twin-mate was resting. He looked alarmed and almost guilty, but instead of a frown on Elna's beautiful face there was a mystifying smile that puzzled and rattled him.

After enjoying Jerrold's bewilderment for a moment, Elna reached over and in a bashful and awkward way carried *his* hand to her lips and kissed it, just as he did hers; then she carefully returned it to him and awkwardly said: "*Thank you, Mr. Hopkins.*"

"Well, of all the cheeky and outlandish things I ever heard of, you certainly take the candy!" exploded young Hopkins, fairly beside himself with astonishment and chagrin. Here was a mere slip of a girl mocking him in such a ridiculous way that it really amounted to a roasting.

"Oh, no, my dear boy; not cheeky at all, just polite," said Elna. "You see you were not polite enough to thank me for the use of my hand when you *borrowed* it; you just dumped it down in my lap and looked like a sheep-killing dog that has been caught with *wool* between its teeth. That is no way to do when you have borrowed something from a nabor and return it;" and she gave him a sweet look of school-ma'am reproof that was sure tantalizing.

Then Jerrold reached over after Elna's hand a second time, but she politely declined to *lend* it to him again; after which they talked almost rationally for an hour, when she arose and remarked: "Little boy, it is long, long after *curfew*-time and you must go to bed immediately and say your prayers *twice* and a *half* this time. I shall expect to meet you in the dining-room promptly at 7:30 to-morrow morning. Good-night and pleasant dreams;" and she audaciously kissed her hand toward him and ran into the cabin and was in her room before he had half recovered from his astonishment. Instead of obeying her order to retire immediately, Jerrold just gasped and lit a fresh cemetery screw and then lolled back and bayed the full moon with his wild and rolling eyes.

An hour later the old Judge found Jerrold in a semi-trance, and tentatively observed: "Jerrold, my boy, you seem dreadfully perturbed. Is it the cemetery hinges or the *new calico*?" and he shot Jerrold a look that made him fairly bounce.

Jerrold was not aware that anyone had observed him and Elna—in fact, he had been so completely absorbed in the girl that he

would not have noticed a sixteen-deck boat passing them. To his fascinated eyes, Elna Zuretta Kampion was the only *visible* thing in existence. He was all but knocked out the *first* round and was still hanging on the ropes and waiting for the final count.

"Oh! I'm all right, Judge; I guess it's the casket pegs," answered Jerrold. "But really, I must get to bed and get a good rest or I'll be in the discard to-morrow. Good-night, Judge;" and he was off like a Missouri swallow darting after a fly.

"Pleasant dreams, my boy," returned the Judge. "But don't get too much *charmeuse* and *georgette* mixed up in your dreams."

"Ah! but youth will have its fling," mused the Judge; "and more of the youngsters hang themselves with *calico* than in any other way. Y-e-s, I guess *I* was a bit younger *myself* at one time. But, confound it! I don't see much chance for Nenverda (*his granddaughter*) ever being related to the Hopkins family;" and the poor old boob sighed resignedly.

Jerrold went direct to his state-room and had the cabin-boy bring him a pitcher of ice-water and a bottle of champagne. "Sleep is out of the question," he said to himself as he closed the door and locked it; "so I must have *company* or I will be in the observation ward before morning." Then he tossed off a big glass of the divine stuff that just romps all over the nervous system and says "Howdy?" to every cell in the brain.

An hour later Jerrold called for more ice-water, and felt competent to sing a solo before the *League of Nations*—in fact, the young Hopkins heir-apparent was having a real old college spree *over* calico instead of *with* it. However, the effects were the same—demoralization, reaction, and—*remorse*.

Jerrold was quite a bit late the next morning and in a very pitiable condition for breakfasting with a beautiful and charming young lady—his temporary *chaperon*. He realized that he had to do *something* and do it in a hurry and do it *properly*. "Oh, if I only had an *understudy* this morning!" he sighed, and then laughed at the absurdity of it.

Elna was up at 6 o'clock, and made a careful and very becoming toilet. Then she went out in the cabin and peeped in the dining-room at 7 o'clock. Only three men were there, quietly lingering over their coffee. She did not intend to go in until her *protégé* was ready to accompany her. "I am a little early," she mused to herself, "but I want Mr. Hopkins to know that I *can* get up

early and do things.” She went out and took a turn about the deck and enjoyed the fresh morning air and the caroling of the birds in the trees. She returned to the cabin and peeped in the dining-room at 7:30, but no Jerrold was there. “Ah! he is lazy, or—yes, *or* ——! I dare not put my thots into words,” she mused. Then she seated herself at the piano and began to play softly with a master touch and soon had everybody except the Hopkins heir in the cabin listening with rapt attention. Even the colored cook and kitchen help could not help “rubbering” a little to see who was the author of such divine music. Then she sang several old love-songs that ought to have caused a wooden cigar Indian to leave its pedestal and join her worshipers. But no Jerrold. Elna was just dying of curiosity to know *why* he did not appear, but she was too wise to place her cards on the table *face up* by making any inquiries about the young man; besides, she realized that some of the others would soon make the inquiry and then she would know without appearing to be interested. Yes, Elna was some diplomat all right, and knew her business pretty well.

About 10 o’clock a big pitcher of ice water was seen going to Jerrold’s room, and the wise ones winked in *italics* and said *nothing* very eloquently. Elna continued to play and sing and had soon captured them all, down to the cabin-boy and the captain’s profane parrot. About 11 o’clock Jerrold came out of his room looking like a Wilsonian promise and the Truth in a Republican convention. He merely glanced at the enraptured crowd about the singer, but did not join them. He sauntered out on deck and filled a long briar pipe with coffin-paint, and began to pollute the atmosphere. At 11:20 Elna picked up her novel and started for the shady side of the deck. The coffin-paint paged the whereabouts of Jerrold long before she discovered his exact location.

“Ah! good morning, Mr. Hopkins,” said Zelna. “You must have had very interesting dreams last night;” and her voice had a pleasantly ironical edge that cut the young man to the marrow.

“Good morning, Miss Kampion,” returned Jerrold. “I assure you that my dreams last night kept a ponderous foot on the gas all night, and they were so very pleasant that I just could not postpone them; so I find myself a little early for dinner.”

“Y-e-s, just a trifle *early* for dinner,” said Elna; “and by the amount of ice water that went to your room last night and this morning I infer that you are on the *dry wagon* with Bryan;” and

she gave him a look that precluded any defense except a plea of *guilty* and a request for a light or suspended sentence. He threw up his hands and capitulated and asked to be court-martialed and shot at daylight—or *sooner*, if convenient.

Elna just laffed and snickered and giggled in the exasperating way that only a pretty girl can laff. Then she changed her tactics and began to *mother* him and coo to him, and then went and got her guitar and sang lullabies to soothe his ragged nerves. Just then dinner was announced by the cabin-boy, but they decided to wait till the "rush" was over before going in. She continued to sing and play for him, and soon he was crazier than ever about her, for now he realized that she was a very talented girl as well as very beautiful and fascinating.

About 1 o'clock they went in and dined together and then went back to the deck for a long chat. She could see that his humiliation was complete, and she became so bright and animated and sweet and cheerful that he almost forgot his little slip of the night previous. "Never again!" he kept repeating to himself as his hungry eyes feasted on Elna.

After about an hour of music and light chatter, Elna laid down her guitar and looked long and calmly into Jerrold's eyes—without saying a word. He began to get so nervous that she said pleasantly: "Mr. Hopkins, I have been looking into your *soul* to see what kind of a cargo you are carrying."

"Y-e-s?" said Jerrold; and he hung his head at half-mast and blushed painfully.

"You have splendid ambitions, plenty of good intentions, but you don't know how to keep your feet on the gas until you *arrive*," said Elna.

■ "Well, *what's* the remedy, doctor?" asked Jerrold.

"You need someone to *love* you, guide you, and—Boss you," replied Elna; and she gave him a look that was a caress and a challenge.

"I believe you are right, Dr. Kampion; but where can I find such a strange combination?" inquired Jerrold.

"At present you are in the *observation ward*, and by the time we reach New Orleans the doctor may be able to determine your mental status, and then I may be able to find such a '*strange combination*' for you," replied Elna. "In the meantime your drinks are to be lemonade, coffee, and *just ice* water. Remember, you are

chauffeur on the *arid buggy*," continued his self-appointed monitor.

"Aye! aye! captain—doctor," said Jerrold, and he got up and gallantly saluted Elna. Then he picked up her guitar and began to play an old Italian love-song with a great deal of feeling and emotion. Jerrold had passed thru the dark night and now the first faint gleam of a *glorious sunrise* was lighting up his regenerated soul, and he just had to play an accompaniment for the millions of bird songs that were echoing thru his heart. The *arid buggy* was a *Seeley mattress* now.

Elna kept him under strict surveillance the remainder of the journey to the Crescent City, and by the use of her wonderful eyes and a liberal tip she had enlisted the cabin-boy (*Tidewater*), and he promised to report to her if Jerrold called for any kind of liquors; he had also promised not to fill such orders. With the aid of *Tidewater* and the co-operation of Captain White, she felt able to manage the young cuss.

Jerrold and Elna were inseparable during the remainder of the trip. They played and sang together and took turns about reading to one another. Jerrold was completely captured, and it wasn't necessary to put the "irons" on him, so to speak. He didn't want to escape; he wanted a *life* sentence, and Judge Elna was preparing to give him just that kind of a sentence, but she wanted to know more about him before taking the BIG CHANCE. He tried to get mushy with her, but she kept up an habitual dignity and made him respect her and keep his place.

"Remember, little boy, you are yet in the *observation ward*, and your medical alienist has not yet decided on your mental status," said Elna. "It is *your own* fault that you were weak enuff to kick over the traces and thus land yourself in the *observation ward*."

"Right you are, O righteous judge," said Jerrold; "and I am stuck on the *arid buggy* with *Bryan glue*."

And so the next few days slipped by, and they were both happy and oblivious.

When the boat reached Vicksburg, it tied up for two hours. Elna told Jerrold that she had a little shopping to do and didn't want him along. She made him promise not to go ashore. She had also restricted him to just *two* little old cemetery pegs a day, and his nerves were pawing the gas and clamoring for the nerve-teasers by the cartons; but she was inexorable. She considered

her *patient* worth saving and realized that the treatment must be more or less heroic.

As soon as Elna got out of sight of the *Water Lily* (the boat), she made for a telegraph office and sent the following wire to her sister in Shreveport:

"Mrs. Torren Smiley,—Send complete information to me at New Orleans, care of the St. Charles Hotel, in regard to Jerrold Jofton Hopkins.
E. Z. K."

Some telegram and some girl, eh? To be sure. Elna Zuretta Kampion was a *live* wire, and didn't believe in giving the grass under her feet any chance whatever. She had always been impressed with the wisdom of the old adage, "*Make hay while the sun shines*," and the weather at that time was very propitious for hay-making, thot this little girl of the Southland.

Every day Jerrold got deeper in love with Elna; and when the myriad lights of the great Southern metropolis came to view, he asked point blank for permission to call on her at her sister's.

"Don't be so impatient, little boy," said Elna. "I will have to see sister first and square things with her and hatch up a mighty good tale of how I came to meet you and how we came to know each other so well in such a short time. I presume that you will be at the St. Charles Hotel and I will send you a note there as soon as I can arrange it *properly*."

So it was settled, and they parted at the wharf. Elna took a taxi for her sister's, Mrs. Pierre Chaldeau, and Jerrold hied himself to the St. Charles Hotel.

CHAPTER III.

KEEPING BOTH FEET ON THE GAS.

Elna soon arrived at her sister's beautiful little cottage out on Choteau Avenue.

"Oh, sister! I met the nicest young man on the boat," said Elna. "Captain White introduced us at the table, you know, and he belongs to one of the oldest and best families in Shreveport, but he is a little wild and woolly yet, having just come home from college."

"But, Elna, you really don't know anything about him, and a casual acquaintance you met on the boat is hardly the proper thing for a girl of your proud old lineage," explained Mrs. Chaldeau. "The captain's introduction was merely a matter of etiquette and

business form that is customary on all boats, but is not binding in the least afterwards, you know. We must know more about the young gentleman before you can receive him socially. I will have Pierre make inquiries about him; or, better still, I will write to sister in Shreveport and have her make an investigation. If he really lives there and is well connected, it will be an easy matter to get his ancestry, antecedents, and social and financial status. A young girl cannot be too careful and particular. There are so many vulgar parvenues in the world, one must be very careful."

"Of course, you dear old thing," said Elna. "You always were long on ancestry, tradition, and all that flapdoodle; but I am quite sure *Mr. Hopkins* is a *gentleman* and well connected. He is just a boy out of college and seems well educated and is quite an accomplished musician, and I know he plays golf and tennis, and knows how to *dine* like a *gentleman* instead of a railroader or business man. He shows his breeding in his clothes, manners, looks, language—in fact, in everything;" and she gave her sister a big squeeze and tried to change the subject.

"Nevertheless, Elna, you will have to wait till we can communicate with Mildred" (Mrs. Smiley), said Mrs. Chaldeau.

"Why, I have already done that, Olvey" (Mrs. Chaldeau), said Elna. "He was so impetuous and wanted to come and see me here, etc., that when the boat tied up at Vicksburg for two hours, I went up town to *shop* and sent Mildred a wire and asked her to look up Mr. Hopkins' pedigree and write me here, so in a few days we will know more about the impetuous youngster;" and again she squeezed her very particular sister.

"Why, Elna!" exclaimed Mrs. Chaldeau; "you have certainly got the *business* sense well developed."

"Oh! I presume I have a little sense of some kind or other," replied Elna; "but you know that desperate ailments require heroic treatment at times, and if you knew this youngster as I do, I think you would agree that my haste was justified. Anyway, I have got to *marry* him or—*drown* him. He is very impatient of all restraint, and just will not be put off."

"Very well, dear; if Mildred's report on the young gentleman is satisfactory, Pierre and I will be pleased to meet him and introduce the youngster to our friends," declared Mrs. Chaldeau, with a note of finality in her proud voice.

The Kampions and Chaldeaus came from a proud and dis-

tinguished old lineage, and they were very exclusive and particular. In two days Elna went to the St. Charles Hotel and found quite a long letter from her sister Mildred. The portion pertaining to Mr. Hopkins ran thus:

"Mr. Jerrold Jofton Hopkins, only son and co-heir with his sister, Miss Fannetta Moss Hopkins, of old Colonel Jerome Lambert Hopkins, is a young man of the very highest lineage and social and business connections in Shreveport. The Hopkins family is a very exclusive and proud old family, with the highest and best traditions. The Colonel is one of the wealthiest planters in Louisiana and his rating is of the best and his social standing is unquestioned. There is no better blood or lineage in all the Southland."

"Ah! that will put sister over on *Rainbow Avenue*," mused Elna to herself as she folded up the letter and placed it in her bosom.

Elna had brought along some of her own private and exclusive stationery that had the old family coat-of-arms engraved on it and was perfumed with an old perfume of her family—the proud old Kampions of France. She now wanted to impress Mr. Hopkins with the fact that she was pretty well up on traditions and ancestry herself. She wrote him a polite and cordial note, asking him to call the next evening at her sister's out on the exclusive Chateau Avenue.

Jerrold called, and was very cordially received and royally entertained. He made an excellent impression on Elna's relatives, and they introduced him into their exclusive social set, and that in itself was an *endorsement* and guarantee of his social status.

Jerrold had forgotten that he had been sent to the city to merely transact a piece of business for his father and then to hurry home with the coveted deed in his pocket. "Oh, well!" sighed the happy youngster to himself, "that pesky old land deal can *wait* awhile. Charmeuse and chiffon are much more to the point anyway," and he laffed at his own sarcasm. "Confound the luck anyway! Here I have no evening suit and only just this one business suit and a few changes of linen—a pretty pickle for a gentleman to be in who has just found the most beautiful and charming girl in all the world and wants to enter her *élite* social circles. Why didn't I wear a jumper and overalls and peel potatoes in the kitchen to pay my way down? Then I wouldn't be in this infernal hole. Well, I have just got to have proper clothes; and it would never do to

wire sister to send on my duds. Dad would smell a mouse right away and would take an airplane for the Crescent City at once."

Jerrold went and looked up the gentleman with whom he was to consummate the land deal, and, as luck would have it, he had been called out of the city the day before and would not return for a week. "Ah! Fate is playing my favorite music now, and I will just write dad a jolly letter and tell him that Mr. Forbes has been called out of the city and will not be back for a fortnight; and in the meantime I will make love to Elna and press my suit—till I win her—for I just must have her. Without her, the river is my home;" and he sighed melodramatically.

Then Jerrold went and filled in the check for the full amount, seventy-five thousand dollars. He opened an account at one of the prominent banks, and then went to a fashionable tailor and gave a big order for some "decent rags," as he facetiously termed it to himself. The "*decent rags*" cost more than five hundred dollars, but what difference did that make? Wasn't he a *Hopkins*—one of the *élite*? and he must have the proper clothes now or he would lose prestige and his caste would soon have a nasty dent in it. "I am a *Hopkins*—a real gentleman and a square sport," mused Jerrold. "What kind of a game could I play with *tin-horn* rags? They would think I was a crap-shooter on lower Canal Street. All the fellows at the St. Charles who have any gambling blood in their veins pitch *twenty-dollar gold-pieces* for the cracks or take a respectable flyer on the bang-tails."

That evening Jerrold got into a little game of twenty-dollar crack-pitching and only lost six hundred dollars without the quiver of an eyelash. This gave him the proper rating and standing, and he soon became very popular and the recipient of numerous invitations to play golf, tennis, poker, baccarat, etc.

In some unknown way Elna became aware of these little diversions of Jerrold's, and she at once put him back in the *observation ward* and restricted his orbit and modified his regimen.

"No more gambling, little boy; that is only another form of *intoxication* and a thru ticket to the bottom of the ladder," said Elna; "besides, you ought to know that I want you to always remain at the very top of the heap. If you will promise me on your word of honor as a *Hopkins* and a *gentleman* that you will cut out all gambling, drinking, cigaretting, and all other habits, so I can be justly proud of you, I will become your wife in one week from

to-day; but I am to be the manager, and you are to obey all my wishes. Can you conscientiously promise all that and keep your promise?" and she took both of his hands in hers and looked clear thru his soul.

"Yes, Elna, I promise you all that," answered Jerrold, "and I am going to be a real man this time and keep my word, because *now* you have made me very happy, and I have something in life worth living for. The man that couldn't keep straight for *you* would have to be a crooked one indeed."

Then Elna gave Jerrold the one thing every man prizes above all else—her *first* kiss—and made his soul step on the gas.

"I suppose you will want the wedding to take place out at your sister's home?" asked Jerrold, and he looked rather dubious.

"Would that suit *you*, Jerrold?" returned Elna; and she read the perturbed state of his mind and guessed the trouble.

"Oh! it would suit me all right enuff, I guess," said Jerrold; "but what would Mrs. Chaldeau think when she found that my people would not be there?" and he looked anything but happy and clear in his own mind.

"It surely would look dusky not to have your people attend your wedding," mused Elna, "so I guess we had better pull it off all by ourselves down town and have a civil marriage and no fuss nor frills about it. Of course, sister will be properly shocked, but, as it is not her affair, she will get over it in time, and the same with *your* people, Jerrold."

"Y-e-s, I guess you are right, dear," said Jerrold; "as it is *our* own affair, we will conduct it to suit ourselves."

So it was arranged, and one week later they were quietly united in marriage by the county judge. They had their arrangements made to take a trip to Chicago. The ceremony took place at 11 o'clock a. m. and at 2 o'clock that afternoon they left for St. Louis on the *Vicksburg*, one of the finest boats on the river. Three days later they arrived in St. Louis, and within a few hours departed by train for Chicago. They didn't even stop long enuff in St. Louis to go and visit her parents—in fact, Elna just couldn't think up an excuse that would go with her parents. They were well-bred and proud people, and would want to know *why* she didn't come home and be married in the usual way; so, for the time being, they passed up all their relatives.

Elna wrote a short note to Madame Chaldeau informing her

sister that she had taken a very romantic and sudden step by marrying Mr. Hopkins and that everything was all right, except that his parents would be more or less upset and want explanations. Madame Chaldeau and her excitable French husband were properly shocked all right.

On the trip up the river, Jerrold also wrote his father a letter announcing his sudden marriage, and assured the "governor" that he had won a treasure and that everything was all right, and that after a short honeymoon trip up the lakes, they would return to New Orleans and close up the land deal, and then come home. He didn't say a word about the check he cashed in New Orleans, but the Colonel soon learned of it thru his bankers in Shreveport. They asked him point-blank if it was all right. "Why, certainly it is all right!" indignantly replied the old planter—game to the last. He felt like wringing the youngster's neck, but his thots were not for the outside world—that was a private affair that did not concern anyone but the Hopkins family.

Jerrold discovered that traveling with a wife is a bit expensive—when one travels first-class and doesn't have to worry about money matters.

Jerrold and Elna took a trip up the lake to Charlevoix and then returned to Chicago by the way of Detroit. When they got back to the Windy City, Jerrold took stock of his finances and found that he only had a little more than thirty thousand dollars left out of the seventy-five thousand dollars his father had given him for the purchase of that timber land.

While up in Charlevoix he tried to recoup his diminishing pile by the roulette route and lost eight thousand dollars one afternoon. Then in Detroit the State Fair was in operation, and Jerrold yielded to his old passion for betting on the ponies—ten thousand more dwindled away. Then a poker game in the smoking-room of the Pullman and three thousand dollars more disappeared. Everything seemed to be against him, but, like all gamblers, he clung to the hope that Fate would favor him soon. He confessed to his wife when they reached Chicago on the homeward trip that he had been a fool, and in trying to win enuff to replace the money belonging to the "governor" he had lost heavily.

"I just can't go home and face the 'governor' unless I can make good what I have lost and have a deed for that confounded

timber land he wants so badly. What will we do, Elna?" he asked, and he searched her face for a remedy.

"Why, we will locate right here, and both of us will go to work and save up our earnings until we can replace the money you so foolishly lost," replied Elna; and her look had a tone of finality about it.

"Why, what on earth could *you* do, dear?" Jerrold asked. "You are only a *girl* anyway, and so small and frail;" and he looked at her in alarm and bewilderment.

"Never you mind about poor little *me*," said Elna. "I will be able to do *my* part in making good *your* losses."

CHAPTER IV.

HOUSEKEEPING AND WORKING.

When they returned to Chicago they registered at the Congress Hotel and engaged a suite of rooms that only cost them twenty dollars a day—without meals. They had been there eight days when Elna found a neat little five-room cottage away out on Cottage Grove Avenue; it only cost them thirty-five dollars a month; that seemed very economical after the way they had been living. It only took a trifle of two thousand dollars to furnish the cottage, and two thousand five hundred dollars got them quite a respectable-looking car. They decided that they would squeeze along with only *one* servant for the present—a girl-of-all-work. By thus living so economically, they could surely save up a little, and thus soon be able to "replace the money Jerrold had—had *borrowed* from his father," declared Elna to her husband.

The third day after getting settled in their new home they got up early (9:40) and after breakfast they made out a list of desirable jobs and started out to look them up.

Elna answered an advertisement for a governess and ladies' maid combined. After making fourteen mistakes in changing cars, she finally reached the right place—a big and sleepy-looking mansion out on the North Shore Drive. A very pompous and English-looking butler, with the regulation side-whiskers and official dignity, admitted her and told her to wait in the front hall. He didn't ask her to sit down. He sensed that she was only a servant seeking work, and servants were expected to stand at attention. Elna seated herself in a comfortable rocker and was looking over a mag-

azine when the mistress entered and hautilly surveyed her thru a lorgnette and said:

"You are in answer to my advertisement for a maid and governess?" and she tried to impress Elna with her lofty importance.

"Perhaps," laconically replied Elna, without even rising.

"Perhaps!" exclaimed the mistress. "Is that the way to address a prospective employer?" and she fairly bridled with astonishment and anger.

"Sit down, madame!" saucily returned Elna in perfect French. "You are too heavy to stand up while you are talking; besides, I am not at all certain that you would please me, for I am awfully particular about my associates."

The woman fairly gasped and turned purple with rage—such insolence she had never encountered before.

"How many have you in your family, madame?" went on Elna without deigning to note madame's choler. "You see, I am not used to big families, and if the kids were not well behaved, I should probably strangle them. And can you give me any references from the last girl who *goved* and *chaped* for you?" and she gave madame a saucy look that caused her to summon the butler.

"James, show this *impossible* young person the way out!" she commanded, and tilted her parvenu nose at just the right angle for North Side society.

As Elna was slowly making her exodus she ran right into madame's husband, who was just returning from his office in one of the big packing-houses. Monsieur was about thirty-eight years old and a rather fine-looking young gentleman, who had an appetite for chicken. Elna made a big hit with monsieur right away.

"Beg pardon, miss, but I will have to confess that I can't recall your name. Won't you tarry awhile longer, that I may have the pleasure of your acquaintance?" he said. Then, turning to the butler, he asked: "James, what is the matter, anyway?" and he looked James over quizzically. The butler had a poker face and betrayed nothing.

"I was just showing mademoiselle out when you—collided with her," answered James, and he bowed to just the proper degree.

"James, show that *person* out!" commanded madame, returning to the vestibule.

"Hold on there, James!" countermanded monsieur. "What's the meaning of these theatricals anyway? Calm yourself, Mildred!" "Come

into the sitting-room, miss, and let's have *your* version of the affair;" and he took Elna by the arm and led her to the elegant and spacious parlor.

"Robert," said madame, this impossible young person was so impudent and ill-bred to MEEE that I ordered James to show her out!" and she glared at the girl balefully.

"All right, Miss—"

"Elna," quietly supplied Elna, with a merry twinkle in her soft Southern eyes that only acted like a red cloth does to a Spanish bull.

"Very well, Miss Elna; let's have your version of the affair;" and he gave his wife a look that she dared not disregard.

"Well, I saw her advertisement for a governess and maid and answered it. Your old bad-mannered butler did not ask me to sit down while he summoned his mistress, but, as I was tired, I just had sense enuff left to sit down and rest myself while she was coming to me. Then she came in and tried to pull all that grand dame English dignity stuff on me, and I just wouldn't stand for it. I punctured her tire and let her know that I'm a regular human being and must be treated as such," and she gave madame an impudent look that was plainly a challenge.

Madame's face went into the purple degree and she started to jump on the gas again, but just then the two children came running in, and as soon as they saw Elna and caught her sweet smile they both made a bee-line for the girl, and she gathered them both up in her arms and just squeezed and loved them. The little girl was five and the boy a little past six.

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Wilver (the boy), "is this our new governess?" and he continued to squeeze and love Elna.

"Yes, Wilver, this is your new governess, and you must be awfully nice to her—or she'll go away and leave us," and monsieur gave his wife a look that said plainly: "Madame, *I'm* the master of my own home."

"But, Robert," wildly protested his wife, "the creature is simply impossible! I'll not have her! James—"

"James, go and see that dinner is served at once!" countermanded monsieur, and James obeyed.

Madame got up and pompously rumbled out of the room like the gentle gait of a steam-roller at a national convention. Elna, just for spite, decided to stay awhile just to spite madame. The children were simply wild about her, and their father was not much behind. "Do you play any, Miss Elna?" he asked, and waved his hand toward the piano. "A little," she answered, and got up and went to the grand old Steinway and just turned herself loose and fairly burned up the keyboard with her

fairy fingers; and oh, how the little devil did sing! The butler forgot his whiskers and dignity and all the servants were rubbering to see the new "governess," as they called her among themselves. They all knew of the little tilt with madame, and everyone was on Elna's side. Robert was simply charmed, for he had a passionate love for music and played the violin fairly well himself; he also had a good bass voice.

After Elna had finished her second song, the butler announced dinner, and Mr. Pelters led Elna into the elegant dining-room. They dined alone, for his wife ordered her dinner served in her private room. She refused to come down until Elna had departed, and that just suited Mr. Robert Pelters to a *t*, for he was already falling hard for Elna, and it is so aggravatingly difficult for a man to fall gracefully and properly for a pretty girl when his wife is present. Mr. Pelters took it for granted that Elna would stick and take the job as governess—but he did not know Elna. After enjoying an excellent dinner and some high-brow champagne with just the proper soft and mellow soul-kick in it, she again played and sang, and the children were delighted and bellowed lustily when they saw Elna leave.

"No, Mr. Pelters, it would be quite out of the question for me to take a position under your wife. So far as *you* and the children are concerned, I should be pleased to remain and do the work, but I could never take orders from that *impossible* woman," and she pronounced and accented the word the way Mrs. Pelters had done.

"Say, how would you like a stage position?" exclaimed Mr. Pelters hopefully.

"Just the thing I've always wanted to do," replied Elna enthusiastically.

"I have a friend who is manager of a theater here," continued Mr. Pelters, "and I know he could take you on, for he was telling me yesterday that their leading lady was sick and had gone to the hospital for an operation. I'll call him the first thing in the morning, and if you will come to my office at 12 tomorrow noon, I'll introduce you to him and give you the proper recommendation?"

"Very kind of you, Monsieur Pelters, and I'll be there and meet your friend," assented Elna.

The next morning Pelters got up earlier than usual and hurried to his office and soon had Mr. Silvers Pendleton, the veteran theatrical manager, on the gab-wire. "To be sure, Bob, I need a girl badly," responded Mr. Pendleton, "and if she is all that you claim for her, I'm in luck. I'll be right there on the dot"—and he was. He was delighted with Elna's

fresh and youthful appearance, and her great beauty made him fairly gasp; but when the three of them had heard her play and sing, he was ready to sign her up.

"Very good, Miss Sembrose," said Mr. Pendleton; "I'll take you on and start you at \$300 a week, and if you make good like I think you can, there will be more salary coming your way. Can you be at rehearsal this afternoon at 2 o'clock?"

"W-h-y, yes, I reckon so," answered Elna, and she blushed like a wild rose.

"Aren't you from the South, Miss Sembrose?" continued the manager.

"Yes—from New Orleans, and my people are all French and Southerners," returned Elna in French.

Elna just couldn't bring herself to give her own name of Hopkins, and that was why she gave the name of Sembrose. She was billed as "*Mlle. Elnece Sembrose, the wonderful pianiste and singer—the new Southern star that has just arisen over Chicago.*" She acquitted herself with the highest honors at the rehearsal that afternoon and then hurried home to tell the news to Jerrold. He might not approve of having his wife a stage beauty to be impudently stared at by the audience and sought by all the stage-door Johnnies, but "it's his own fault—he should not have been so foolish and reckless," mused Elna to herself on the way home. She reached their cottage at 5 o'clock and at once told Gulhundy (the Swede girl) to have supper ready by 6, as she had an engagement for that night and must leave by 7 for the theater. At a quarter of 6 Jerrold came in looking happy and hopeful.

"Well, what luck, Jerrold?" asked Elna as she drew his head down and kissed him with an old-timey *Red River* kiss.

"Splendid, sweetheart mine!" and he gathered her in his arms and kissed her as tho she were an *affinity* or a stenographer. "I met Hartley Fenners, an old college chum, and his father is the president of a big trust company here, and they just happened to need a cashier to take the place of the old one, who died of the influenza; so he introduced and recommended me and I get the job right away—in the morning. Three hundred a month to start with—that's just fine, sweetheart, and if we live carefully, I know we can soon make good and square up the score with the governor," and he looked as happy as a school-boy in his first high-top boots with a circus ticket in his pocket. "What luck did you have, dear?" and he was puzzled at the look of amusement on Elna's face.

"Oh! fair, I reckon," Elna answered; "they're going to give me a try-out down at the X-O-V Theater tonight, and if I make good, I'll get

some salary I reckon;" and she looked so sheepish and happy he did not know what to make of it.

"Try you out at the theater?" he fairly gasped. "Why, I didn't know you were an *actress*?"

"Well, Jerrold, I'm not exactly an actress yet," was her reply, "but I believe I can make good. You see I can play and sing a little, and you never saw me try to *act*; I may be able to surprise you. Anyhow, I'm engaged at a trifle of \$300 a week to start with, and if I make good and put it across, I may be able to coax down some real salary;" and she struck a Shakespearean and Bernhardt attitude that was most laffable. "If you're a real good little boy, I may let you go along with me tonight. Jerrold, I thot it best to not give my own name, so I'll be *Mlle. Elnece Sembrose, Pianiste and Singer*," on the billboards and programs, and don't you go and forget and give it away either;" and she gave him a look that couldn't be blue-penciled.

Elna made a tremendous hit that night and was encored and called back till the manager would not let her respond any more. After one week he raised her salary to \$500 a week. Every night Elna became more and more of a favorite.

Everything went along nicely, and Elna was putting her salary in a bank; they lived on Jerrold's salary, and saved one hundred of that, and Elna deposited it with her salary—in a bank that her husband did not know of. She realized that she could not trust him and she feared he might "blow out a tire" any time and relapse back to his old habits of gambling—in an effort to get rich quick. He was fretting dreadfully because his father did not even deign to write to him. Nothing cuts like silence at times—it is a blade that has an icy edge, and Jerrold grew very restive and unhappy under its merciless gruelling. "If the Governor would only write and bless me out, or have me pinched, or something, I could bear it much better—but this infernal silence is what gasses my goat!" he thot, and looked very miserable. The way of the transgressor never was much of a Seeley mattress, and Jerrold was finding it out for himself. He didn't like the medicine and was about to kick over the traces again.

"Even if everything continues as now," he said to himself, "with the \$2,100 a month that Elna is saving up for the Governor it will take about three years to get enuff to replace the \$75,000 I *borrowed* from him. *Hell!* that's *too* slow; besides, Elna will have to give up her job in about three months more, and then she won't be able to go back, even if they want her *then*, for about a year after the youngster comes; and I'm getting jolly good and tired of living on a paltry little \$200 a month for the three

of us, and soon there'll be *four* in our family; and then all the expense of the doctor and a nurse, etc., and another thousand will be following the wild geese north," and so he mused from day to day.

They had to get up at the beastly hour of *seven*, or, at least, he did, and hurry like blazes to get down to the bank in time; and in the evening, when he was off duty and would have liked to enjoy some social life with his wife, she had to be away off down there at that playhouse—being admired by a lot of cheap Johnnies and made love to in the plays on the stage; and that damned leading man, Roderick Beverly Blackmere, was a deucedly handsome young fellow anyway, and it was very galling to have to remain at home or go off and amuse himself, and to picture his Elna, his own little wife, in that scoundrel's arms, was anything but satisfactory. He soon decided to find a shorter and better way out of their troubles.

CHAPTER V.

BLOWING OUT A TIRE.

The more Jerrold thought of his "*hard luck*," as he termed it, the more dissatisfied he became. "If Elna only had a job where she would not have to fall into that man's arms every night and promise to wed him, it wouldn't be so bad," mused Jerrold; "but if she had almost any other job, she would only be earning about \$25 a week—a mere nothing." Any way he turned his problem around and looked at it, it was disheartening.

Things drifted along, and Elna became more and more popular at the theater—not only with the audiences, but with the players; and to make things more embarrassing, Mr. Roderick Beverly Blackmere, the leading man, was really in love with Elna and doing his best to win her love and hand in marriage. One mistake she had made was in telling them that she was a *widow*. Mr. Blackmere, believing that she was unmarried, pressed his suit vigorously, and while she did not actually resent his attentions, she held him at a distance and he simply could not make a bit of headway.

"If I tell the boobs the truth that I have a husband, they will all turn against me for deceiving them, and when the story leaks out, I'll not be half so popular, and maybe Mr. Pendleton will discharge me. I just must hold the job and thus help Jerrold, dear old Jerrold, to recoup his losses and get his head above the waves again. Then we can step on the gas a little and have our names paged in the society columns." Thus the faithful little soul reasoned to herself when alone with her thots and soul.

After the holidays she *had* to quit the theater and go into retirement in her own little cottage; and oh, how she thot and planned for the event and

their future! "It just must be clear and illustrious and our baby must have no stain on its name." Ah, how like a mother! Anything that threatens their offspring gets under their epidermis and smarts clear into the soul.

She tried to be patient and optimistic and did her best to keep her husband cheerful and hopeful, but he was of a different mould and had an eye for clouds. "I just know she'll never be able to get back her job at the theater, and a mother with a kid won't be much of an attraction anyway, and the manager will be quick to realize the fact. He might use her for atmosphere in the ballet at \$25 per, and that would break her heart sure. Damn it! I must find some other way to get our heads above the water," and his musings became more dismal and pessimistic.

Things ran along in the same rut and the baby made its appearance the last of the following May. The youngster was a beautiful little girl and had all the best of both parents' features. It was all and more than they hoped for, and its coming greatly changed Elna and gave her a new viewpoint in life. She was very happy, and if Jerrod would only behave himself and not make any more foolish breaks, they would soon be on the right side of Life's old ledger again. Instead of Jerrold being pleased with his dauter, as any sane and normal man would have been, he rather resented the whole business. He considered it an unfortunate circumstance at the present time, for it complicated their affairs dreadfully and made it all the harder to get in the clear again.

Elna had merely told Mr. Pendleton that her mother was near death's door and the doctors had advised that there was no chance for her recovery after the operation. She could live but a few months, and had begged her dauter to come home and be with her during her last days. No manager, unless he was an exceedingly hard-boiled one, could disregard a request like that. Of course, the yarn about her mother's condition was pure fiction she invented as an excuse for quitting a position where she was an idol and doing so well. "Very well, Miss Sembrose; we shall expect you to return at the earliest moment, and I hope your mother gets well," and he turned away as he tried to swallow something that seemed several sizes too large for his oesophagus.

Elna bade them all a tearful farewell, and tried to avoid Mr. Blackmere entirely, but he was the last to grasp her hand and silently press it. He merely mumbled: "We shall all be so lonesome without you—hurry back." "I shall miss you all, my dear friends and comrades, and I hope to soon be back with you again." That was all, and she felt ill at ease with herself for having to deceive them; "but I *had* to do it," she assured herself.

Things drifted out at the cottage and at the bank until the last of July, when Mr. Andrew Baker Fenners and his family departed for a six weeks' sojourn in the Adirondacks. Mr. Fenners came down to the bank Friday forenoon and told Jerrold that he was going to practically leave the management of the whole institution in his hands, and warned the young man to look after things carefully and see that everything was properly locked up and in place before leaving the bank in the evenings. "I shall keep an eye out for everything, sir," said Jerrold, "and I anticipate no trouble, for I'm sure you have an excellent set of employees and there is no friction among us, as so often happens," and he shook the president's hand as they parted. Jerrold felt the importance of the extra trust placed in him by their president, and he intended to give a good account of his stewardship; but alas! all human flesh has its limit of endurance—and also has its limits in the amount of temptation it can stand.

Jerrold felt very important now that he was the *big finger* of the institution. He soon discovered how easy it would be to "*loan*" himself big amounts of the bank's funds. In the morning paper one day about the center of August he read a very fascinating story of a young plunger in the pit who made a lucky strike the day before and had cleaned up more than a half million. "Whew!" exclaimed Jerrold to himself as he read and re-read the story. "Why can't I take a flyer in the pit and make a killing and be able to straighten up my affairs at once?" He pondered over the matter for two whole days and most of two nights. As it would happen, the young man who had made such lucky plunges in the pit came in the bank one afternoon just before closing time and deposited a hundred thousand he had made that day in sugar. "Rather a *sweet* plunge?" he facetiously observed to Jerrold, who received the money and issued him a bank-book and told him they were pleased to have such customers as he was.

The next day Jerrold "*borrowed*" \$75,000 from the bank and sent it to his father by express. "There! that little mistake is rectified, and maybe the Governor, the dear proud Governor, will write to a fellow now," and he seemed about ten years younger. "The president will not return for a month yet, and if I can't win that little old amount back before he arrives, I deserve to be pinched and executed," and he swelled up like sugar prices and hotel rates.

The next day, during the noon hour, he took \$50,000 out of the till and slipped over in the pit and took a flyer on sugar. He won a paltry \$20,000, and this just put the lava in his blood. He plunged again the next day on oil stock and slipped back \$30,000. This little mishap added a few chunks of ice to his blood. The next two weeks he played the

market with varying success—one time he almost won out—the entire \$75,000, and his spirits were walking along on the snow-capped ridgepole of the Rockies. Then his “*luck*,” as he called it, began to slip, and soon he was \$175,000 toward the cemetery. “This will never do!” he declared over his last loss. “I simply don’t know enuff about the game to play it successfully, and I am going to quit it right now and change climates, and the changing has got to be done while the Old Man is away; after he comes back he’ll want to go over everything with me and check up to see that all is well.”

That was Thursday night after supper. The next day was Friday and Saturday was Labor Day, a legal holiday, and the bank would not open. Friday evening Jerrold “*borrowed*” \$300,000, and he sent Elna \$50,000 of it and a note telling her what he had done.

“You can wait for me or do as you like, but I just couldn’t stand the strain any longer. I am going to make the money to square up with the bank, if they don’t get me, and then it’s me for the straight and narrow path—the road that has no thorns nor pitfalls. I’ll not dare to communicate with you, or they will trace me thru my letters. I love you, little sweetheart-wife, and will yet make good—if you have faith in me and wait. I sent back the \$75,000 that belonged to the Governor, and thank God that is squared up and I can once more go home and look my people in the face. Kiss the baby for me, and sometime I hope to be a credit to both of you.

Your loving husband,

“JERROLD.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISCOVERY OF JERROLD’S FLIGHT.

Labor Day was a big help to the fleeing cashier, for the bank would not open at all that Saturday; so he would have from 3 p. m. Friday till 10 a. m. Monday before his defalcation and flight would be discovered. Almost three days—a pretty good start from a place like Chicago. Of course, the papers got the story and exploited it and lingered over it like a buzzard tarries over its carrion. The bank knew Jerrold by his right name and had his address. The officers and reporters were soon out to the cottage to interview his wife, and it didn’t take the reporters and detectives long to recognize in Elna the late ingenue, *Mlle. Elnece Sembrose*. This was a rich morsel for their papers and they played it up on the front pages with “stud-hoss type,” as they call it in Kentucky printing shops. The theatrical people were surprised, but not shocked. They were profoundly sorry for Elna, and called on her and proffered their sympathy and help. “Ah! now I understand,” was the way Mr. Blackmere phrased

it when speaking to Elna. She was very grateful to them, but did not need any help—in a financial way, of course. She needed sympathy and companionship, and Mr. Pendleton tried to persuade her to return, “and bring the baby along and we’ll make a great star out of her,” is the way he put it. “I thank you all very much for your kindness, but I could never go back there and be the laughing-stock of all the coarse fools and smart guys,” said Elna, with a tone of finality in her voice.

Jerrold went direct to Milwaukee, and he met an old turfman there who was just ready to start for the Minnesota State Fair at Minneapolis. Jerrold had disguised himself as a gambler and turfman, and no one ever dreamed that he was the eloping cashier from Chicago on whose head was a reward of \$25,000. They reached the Mill City on Sunday evening, and stopped at the same place—a rooming-house of the better type and in a respectable part of town. This suited Jerrold to a *t*, for he knew he would be looked for at the best hotels. The races are always the big gambling event at all these fairs, and many a boob has gone broke trying to pick the right nag.

The old turfman was old enuff to be Jerrold’s grandfather and had taken a strange liking to the boy. He gave Jerrold many tips. The cashier played all these tips and won seven times out of eight. He cleaned up a little more than \$50,000, and liked the Swede city so well that he was tempted to locate and become a citizen; but he realized the hounds would soon be on his trail. “My only safety is to keep moving and always be a few jumps ahead of them. If I can only win enuff to pay the bank and square up with them, I’ll soon be in the clear,” mused the lad to himself as he quietly departed for Butte, Montana, without even bidding the old turfman good-bye. He liked Butte and remained two days, and won \$7,680 at roulette. He would have taken a flyer in mining stock, but he couldn’t stay to look after it; so he passed that up and moved on to Spokane, Washington. Here he lost \$400 at poker and swore he would never try that game again. He drifted on to Seattle and tarried here four days on account of the State Fair. Here he was lucky with the bang-tails and won \$64,870. Here he planted his money in five different banks, and then, with only \$15,000, he moved on up to Vancouver by boat. He liked this town and was strongly inclined to locate and become a useful citizen, but—he felt that continuous traveling was the best remedy to avoid people he did not want to meet. While in Vancouver he lost \$17,000 the first two days, and then plunged and came up smiling with \$54,630. Then the wanderlust germs took up a homestead in his blood and he sailed for Frisco. Here he lost \$20,000, and a little later won \$34,652. Los Angeles was

his next stop, and here he bit \$22,780 out of some real-estate sharks that had him picked for a tenderfoot. He was so strongly impressed that a wanderlust victim was following him, or rather playing the same circuit, that he doubled back to Frisco and picked up \$540 at roulette and then shipped to Hongkong.

He had a very pleasant trip, and only dropped \$740 in a friendly game of draw poker with some missionaries that were going to China to save the "heathen" of those sinful places. "Well, the 'heathen' have my sympathy anyway," he mused to himself just before landing. Three days in the great Celestial city convinced him that it was no place for a gentleman or crook unless they understood the language and knew the mysteries of fan-tan and how to use opium artistically. Tokio seemed to be calling him by wireless, and here he met some interesting American and English gentlemen who knew a few gentlemanly games, like bridge whist, pinochle, poker, baccarat, golf, tennis, etc. His luck was against him at first, and then it changed and he cleaned up a little pin-money (\$17,485) before sailing for Manila. He liked Manila, for the natives and those acclimated had a lazy and languid way about them that reminded him of the people of Louisiana. Here luck was with him, and he made a killing of \$97,542 in four days. As he had a sweet tooth, he got the first boat for Honolulu—the land of eternal summer, flies, foliage, sugar, scarcity of clothes, and the ukulele. He took a dip in sugar here, and cleaned up \$54,786 in four days. Then he saw a big boat from Sidney preparing to start back home, and as the band was playing "Farewell to Thee," he decided to pull his freight at once. In due time he landed in the very interesting capital of New South Wales. Here and in Adelaide and Melbourne he discovered that all games must be played fairly as became square sports. "No missionary could get a look-in down here," thot Jerrold to himmself. From Melbourne he sent back to the bank in Chicago \$250,000 and a brief note requesting the officials to keep their lingerie on and be patient and he would come across with the balance of the "loan." He sent the money to Chicago a few hours before he embarked for Auckland, New Zealand. Here we will leave the gentlemanly cashier for awhile, until we can go back to Chicago and see how things are coming on.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PURSUIT AND REWARD.

When the other employees arrived at the bank that memorable Monday morning and found how matters stood, they immediately wired the president and he came on at once. The amount the cashier had borrowed

did not seriously interfere with the bank's business, and with the prompt assistance of the other banks the institution was able to keep its doors open and resume business. "The damned little pippin!" was the president's comment when he reached the bank about noon and learned the full facts of the case.

Then the president called out at the cottage and had an interview with Elna, and she promptly turned over the \$50,000 that Jerrold had sent her on the eve of his departure.

"Well, this helps some, and that only leaves \$175,000 he owes us," kindly remarked Mr. Fenners. "For your sake, Mrs. Hopkins, I dislike to prosecute him, but the case is already in the hands of the law and I cannot now stop it without compounding a felony, you know," and he looked genuinely sorry.

"I cannot expect any mercy from you all," sighed Elna, and she hung her pretty head at half-mast.

Mr. Fenners employed the son of his old school-mate, Mr. Ralvert Stacy Chase, to run down Jerrold and bring the wandering little cuss to book. Ralvert Stacy Chase had only had two years' experience in the business with a big detective agency, but had already earned a reputation and was considered one of the best in the business. He was only twenty-five years old, and was well educated and understood half a dozen languages. He had an uncanny faculty for finding trails where none existed—to ordinary detective talent. He was also fond of traveling and knew most of the world already. He had no wife nor family ties and the wanderlust germs were strong in his blood. He was also an accomplished musician and played several instruments and sang well. He had had two years on the stage and knew the make-up business to a *t*.

"Just the man for the job," mused Mr. Fenners as he recalled the young man's unusual fitness for the job. "Now, Mr. Chase, I'll pay you \$25,000 cash if you catch the cuss and bring him back here for trial; in addition to that, I'll pay the expenses of the trip and give you 10 per cent of all our money you recover from him. We want him and we are determined to have him. I'm a member of the Bankers' Association, and we all chip in and cover the expenses of apprehending every employee who betrays his trust. We believe in making an example of these fellows, and thus deterring others who may be inclined to kick over the traces. And every case you win your stock will appreciate accordingly; so get busy and keep your nose to the trail."

Mr. Chase was provided with a photograph of Jerrold and a minute description of him. He was particularly interested in knowing where the

fleeing cashier was born and raised and all about his people—where he went to college, his fads and tastes, the kind of clothes and ties he wore, his musical talents if any, the kind of amusements he preferred, his tastes in reading, etc.

“What has his birthplace got to do with it, Mr. Chase?” asked Mr. Fenners, with a gleam of curiosity in his steel-blue eyes.

“Considerable. All persons reared in the Southern States have a keen desire to see the North, and Louisianians, Mississippians, and Texans have a particularly strong desire to visit the Northwest,” quietly declared the trailer; “so I’ll start in by going to St. Paul and Minneapolis, for I feel sure of finding a trail in the Twin Cities. Then he’ll probably aim for Seattle, Vancouver, Frisco, Los Angeles, and then to Japan and China; then to the Philippines, Hawaii, and Australia.”

“Heavens!” gasped the president; “I’d hate to have *you* on my trail”—and they both laughed.

Mr. Chase was well provided with credentials and travelers’ checks, money, etc., and was soon on his way to the Twin Cities. He put in a day and a half and finally found a trail in Minneapolis among the turfmen. He knew Jerrold’s weakness for the ponies, roulette, and the games of chance. The only thing that puzzled him was the fact that the cashier could not be traced to any of the highbrow hotels. “He’s certainly a little smooth here,” mused the detective to himself. “He knows that a man of large means would naturally be looked for at the first-class hotels and theaters. Some fox all right, and I must remember that to his credit. It never pays to underrate your adversary,” wisely mused the sleuth. “As the fair is over, he’ll probably move on, and as he is well aware that someone is after him, he’ll not linger long in any one place—unless he’s a fool, and it will hardly do to place the boob in that category.”

Chase did not deem it worth while to stop off in Butte; so he went on to Spokane, and soon picked up the trail. Then he hurried on to Seattle, but here Jerrold had so carefully covered up his \$-webbed feet that it took Chase nearly three days to get a trace. He was chagrined to find that the cashier had only three days the start of him out of Seattle. In leaving Seattle the cashier resorted to a clever trick that threw the detective clear off the trail. Jerrold bought a ticket to Frisco and appeared in his own person without any disguise. He departed on the train as tho the whole world were lovely and no detectives in existence. As the train slowed down for a railroad crossing out about four miles he dropped off and went into a grove and changed his appearance; then back to town, and that evening he left on a boat for Vancouver. The detective went on to Frisco and

spent nearly three days before he smelled a rodent. Then he beat it back to Seattle, and soon found the trick that had been played on him. He had much difficulty in picking up the trail in the British city, but finally found the right trail. Here Jerrold had tried the same train trick by buying a ticket to Seattle and leaving open and undisguised on the morning train for Seattle. "Hm! some heap right smart fox!" laffed the detective to himself; "but he will only be wasting good money on railroad tickets—so far as I'm concerned."

And so on thru the Orient he traced the cashier. When Chase reached Melbourne, he met with an aggravating accident that laid him up for about five weeks. He was run into by a car and his right leg broken. Of course, he could have used the wireless and had his bird headed off and held, but he was a game and *square* sport and scorned to have any help; besides, he wanted all the glory himself, and he was enjoying the trip and learning many valuable things that would be an asset ever afterward. His expenses were paid; so why hurry? "A cat never calls in other cats to help it catch a mouse," mused the detective to himself while in the surf at Sidney one evening; "so why should I call in help to capture one poor little mouse that is traveling so fast he'll soon run out of territory and cork himself?" Not a bad observation at all.

Jerrold left Auckland for Lima, Peru; then to Santiago, Chili; then to Buenos Aires. He tarried in the Argentine metropolis more than a week, and cleaned up \$28,765. Five hundred dollars of this amount he won on a chicken-fight; in fact, Jerrold was getting to be some sport and would take a chance on almost anything—except women and missionaries. His next move was down to Rio de Janeiro. He liked this lazy, dreamy, poetic old burg, and could find every kind of a game from cockroach-fights, bull-battles, chicken-sparring, and on up to love-making, revolutions, and international intrigues. He tarried ten days, and lost and won alternately. His first luck was with a lottery—an insignificant \$25,000. Then he lost on a horse-race, and won back on a wrestling-match. Then he got in a game of fly-loo with some international sports and put away \$34,786. At one session of the Chinese game there were an even twenty of them and they used \$100 bills for ante—\$2,000 in each jack pot. From the Brazilian capital he slipped across to Havana and bet on a bull-fight, and won \$20,000 and almost got in a fight himself over the money. Then to Key West, where he won on a prize-fight and lost on a chicken-fight. The Cigar City was too slow, and he sailed up the coast and was soon in Jacksonville. He liked this town, but he met too many people there from Chicago; however, he was lucky again, and the bang-tails advanced his roll \$48,690.

Then a run over to Palm Beach for a short stay. Here he took a flyer on a boat-race and won \$800. Then he lost \$450 of that on a poker game the same night, and he renewed his resolution to never play that game again. His next try was a \$1,000 bet with a wealthy clubman from New York on a golf game, and again he was lucky. Just before he left here he sent the balance of what he owed the Chicago bank to them by express. He breathed much easier now, for he had more than \$100,000 on hand and did not so much fear the inevitable arrest. His longing to see his wife and people again overcame all else, and he lighted out for New Orleans. Here he was lucky, and won \$80,460 in a week. He now looked up the real-estate man and soon had a deed for that land in his pocket. He bought it for an even \$45,000. The tract contained 6,000 acres and would soon be very valuable. "Ah! now I can go home and face the Governor and the *whole world!*" and the thot made him very happy.

CHAPTER VIII. GOING HOME.

He spent two weeks in dear old New Orleans, and then booked passage up the *Red River* on the same boat he came down on. Captain White was surely surprised to see the lad again. He knew of the sad news from Shreveport, but also supposed that Jerrold knew it, and out of consideration for the boy's feelings forbore to mention the subject. Jerrold avoided almost everybody on the boat and was glad he knew none of the passengers. He arrived in Shreveport about 9 p. m. and immediately started for the plantation. He soon arrived, and found Fannetta out on the big veranda all alone; but what a change in the girl! She looked twenty years older. "What in the world was the matter, I wonder?" he asked himself as soon as he caught sight of her. Fannetta heard the snort of a rolk (automobile) down at the big gate, but it was too dark to tell who had arrived. When her brother was about half-way up the old graveled walk she recognized him and gasped. "Oh, thank Heaven he has returned at last!" she fervently exclaimed, and dashed down the walk to meet him.

As soon as he saw her, he cried: "Hello, sis! so glad you had not retired." He clasped her in his arms and kissed her tangled hair and tried to speak, but the words just wouldn't come to the surface. She just sobbed and clung to him as tho her whole life was about to go out forever. "Why, sis! what's wrong? tell me at once!" and he held her off at arms' length and gazed into her agonized face—a face so pale and ghastly it frightened him.

"Oh, Jerrold! don't you know? Haven't you heard?" and she trembled like a Mississippian with an Arkansaw chill.

"Why, no; I just got back from a rather extended trip abroad and haven't had a bit of news from anybody; so I came right home. How's the Governor?" was Jerrold's reply.

"Oh, Jerrold! brother! it is so hard, but you must know. Daddy *died* a month after getting your letter, and he never forgave you. It just killed him. I know he longed to see you again before the end came, but he was too proud to say so," and Fannetta again buried her face on Jerrold's breast and cried softly.

"There, there, sis; I'm awfully sorry he is gone, for I have made good and have the deed to the land and plenty of money besides," said Jerrold, and he tried to soothe her. They were now on the porch and he suddenly asked: "Oh! how's mother? I must see her at once," and he started toward the door leading into the house.

Fannetta sprang forward and seized his arm and pulled him back. "Mother is very sick, Jerrold," she said, "and the sudden shock of seeing you at present would be sure to kill her. You must wait till to-morrow and we must break the news to her gently. Where's your *wife*, Jerrold?" and she bestowed a curious look on him and noted that his face blanched perceptibly.

"Why—er—I had to make a long trip abroad for our house and had to leave her and the kid behind—in Chicago;" and he looked sheepish and uncertain.

"But *why* didn't you bring her home? You knew we'd want to meet her and—and—*love* her;" and again she studied his face closely.

"Well, you see, I came home by way of Cuba and New Orleans, and decided to come on here first and see you all before returning to Chicago;" and as he saw she readily accepted his reasonable explanation, his face cleared up and he actually smiled. "I just have the dearest little wife in all the world, sis, and I just know *you* will like her. Of course, I thot it best to come home *alone* first and square myself with the Governor before bringing my wife home;" and his old-time smile and nerve came back to him.

They talked a couple of hours, and then he went to his old room and slept soundly untily 8:30 the next morning.

Fannetta had kept his room ready and in perfect order, for she had a premonition that he would wander back *sometime*, and she wanted everything just as he left it. "Oh! how can I ever tell him that his father disinherited him and left everything to *me*?" she cried, and she was sore puzzled to find the right words. "Of course, I'll share it with brother, for that would only be simple justice. Because *I* happen to be stronger than

he, and less liable to temptations, is no reason why he should be deprived of his rights;" and her voice had a decisive tone about it.

The next morning Fannetta and her brother ate a late breakfast together, and she tried so hard to make everything pleasant and easy for him. She dreaded his meeting with his mother, and decided to wait till the doctor came at about noon, and then they would be able to arrange it some way, for he must see his mother shortly or it might be *too late*. She had grieved so over her son's conduct and the subsequent loss of her husband that she had very little vitality left, and Fannetta feared that a great shock would finish her. The nurse had reported that she had rested well and had slept quite soundly after 2 a. m., and seemed much refreshed and stronger.

"Her first inquiry on awakening was for her son," the nurse reported to Fannetta; "and she says she dreamed that he had come home from over the waters," continued the nurse.

"Good!" exclaimed Fannetta; "that will facilitate matters very much and will greatly lessen the shock;" and she looked much relieved.

The nurse then returned from the sick-room and said: "Miss Hopkins, your mother is very much awake and wants to see you at once. She wants to discuss her dream with you, I think;" and the nurse went out for a stroll in the spacious grounds and to gather fresh flowers for the sick-room.

Fannetta hurried to her mother's bedside and was soon clasped in the elder woman's arms. "Oh, daughter!" she said, "I had such a strange dream last night—I dreamed that Jerrold came home from far over the seas, and he didn't even know that his father had passed away. Wasn't it strange, Fannetta? I wonder if dreams ever come true?"

"Yes, mother dear, dreams often come true, and I think yours will come to pass soon;" and she bent down and kissed her mother tenderly.

"Oh, Fannetta! what makes you think my dream may come true? I didn't know that *you* believed in dreams—you're so practical;" and her dim and blurred old eyes had an incredulous look in them.

"Well, I don't believe in dreams as a general thing," replied Fannetta, "but you know there are exceptions to all rules, and I dreamed almost the same thing last night. But, mother, you could not see Jerrold if he did come home this very day; you're so excitable, the doctor says, and the shock of suddenly meeting Jerrold might set you back dreadfully, and you know how anxious we all are to have you get well and be your own dear self again."

"Fiddlesticks on the doctor and his ideas of shock!" cried Mrs.

Hopkins. "Nothing in all the world would help me so much and bring back my strength and health as to be able to clasp my poor boy in my arms and tell him that we forgive him;" and she started up in a fine spirit of scorn and rebellion; but her mind was stronger than her body, and she sank back exhausted by the effort to show her contempt for the doctor and his opinions.

"Very well, mother; if he comes today, shall I bring him right in?"

"Why, certainly, bring him right in—don't even wait to come and tell me first—I want to see my boy the minute he arrives; but, Fannetta, why do you hold out such a forlorn hope for me? I don't believe a word about your dream—you just told me that to buoy me up."

"Really, mother, I dreamed of Jerrold last night and on several other occasions I dreamed of him—and in all my dreams of him he was coming home—always wearily trudging his way back home—and *alone*;" and again Fannetta kissed and soothed her mother. "Listen! I do believe that is a car coming up the driveway now. I'll run and see;" and she was off like a kid starting to the circus. In about five minutes she was back at her mother's bedside, and just behind her was Jerrold.

"Jerrold! Oh, my boy! my boy!" and the mother fairly jumped up, and Jerrold clasped her in his arms and kissed her face and hair and just said *nothing* very eloquently as he tried and tried to swallow something that was several sizes too large for his throat.

Fannetta tiptoed out of the room and left them alone—their grief and happiness was too great and sacred to have a witness.

In about ten minutes Jerrold came running out and called to his sister: "Fannetta! Oh, sister, come quick—mother has *fainted*!" and his face went white and he grew so nervous that he almost became hysterical.

"I'm afraid you overtaxed her strength, Jerrold," responded Fannetta. "She was so weak and nervous and the doctor warned her against any sudden shock; but maybe she has just temporarily fainted. Go and summon the nurse, and also tell Mammy Harris to come."

The nurse and Fannetta worked over Mrs. Hopkins faithfully for ten minutes, and then the nurse suggested that they summon the doctor.

It was nearly three hours before the physician arrived. He felt her pulse, examined her heart, and sadly shook his head. "Syncope—heart exhaustion from overtaxing the brain and nerve-supply centers," he said.

"But you can revive her, Doctor?" anxiously asked Fannetta, with her stricken soul in her eyes.

"I'll do my best, Miss Hopkins," replied the physician, "but I'm

afraid it is too late. She is so weakened from her long spell of sickness and mental anguish over the loss of her husband, and—”

“Yes, yes, Doctor, I understand; but let’s get to work and do everything in our power;” and her tone indicated that talking was the poorest of all the possible remedies.

They worked long and faithfully over Mrs. Hopkins, but she gradually sank into a semi-stupor, and then lapsed into the unconsciousness that usually precedes death. That night at 9:42 she passed out, and the stricken household was again in the deepest shadows. The burial took place two days later, and Fannetta and her returned brother had the sympathy of the entire community. A few of the inner circle understood the real cause of the Colonel’s sudden taking off and the sudden passing of Mrs. Hopkins, but they were too fine and well-bred to talk of it. It was one of those human tragedies that cannot be helped, and lamenting it or discussing it would only add to the tragedy and increase the suffering of the living. Like all other tragedies, Time, the great peace-maker, soon blunts the sharp corners and slips it over into the *Memory Class*.

CHAPTER IX.

VISITORS.—STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN.

Colonel Hopkins had disinherited his son and left everything to his wife and daughter. A provision of his will was that if his wife died before the daughter died, the entire estate and everything was to go to the girl; so Fannetta was now a very rich girl—for that section of the State, at least. The estate and personal holdings totaled up about a million and a half—exclusive of the 6,000 acres of timber land that Jerrold had just bought in the name of his father; but, as his father was deceased at the time, and as dead men cannot hold property, here was a fine piece for legal pyrotechnics—in plain English, *legal bull!* It was a hard blow for Fannetta to tell her brother the provisions of his father’s will, but it had to be done, and she knew that *she* could break the disagreeable news to him in a softer way than their lawyer could. On the second day after the funeral Fannetta summoned up enough courage to tell him the disagreeable news.

“But you know, Jerrold, dear,” she said in conclusion, “I shall divide everything equally with you. There is plenty for us both, and it was mother’s dying wish that she and I should undo your father’s injustice to you; and I want you to stay right here and take his place and manage everything just as he had always planned that you would do some day. His anger and misunderstanding of you need make no difference *now*.”

“That is very sweet of you, sister,” responded Jerrold, “and I should

like to stay and start all over again, but, you see—I have a *wife* and *dauter* now, and that changes everything.”

“Fiddlesticks! Jerrold, what difference do a wife and dauter make anyway? There’s plenty of room here for all of us, and I’ve always wanted a *sister*—and, just think, a little *niece* too! Why, brother, brother, I’m just tickled to death that you are married and have a child. If you were not married now, it would only be a question of time until you took that step anyway; so what’s the difference?”

“Very well, sister, if you really want it that way, I’ll stay here with you and try to manage things. The niggers always liked me and I’ll be able to manage them better than an outsider; but I won’t have any of the property, mind you—just a nominal salary as your superintendent. You may let that timber land I bought be mine if you like; that is as much as I will accept.”

So it was agreed, and Jerrold was to hurry back to *Chicago* and bring his wife and dauter on to the old plantation and they would all live happily together—so Fannetta thot.

“*Chicago—Hell!*” thot Jerrold to himself. “How can I go back there now and be pinched? It is true I’ve paid back all the money I *borrowed*, but that doesn’t square me with the *law*. And I don’t even dare to risk a letter, either, for the hounds would trace me thru that.” He turned it over and over in his mind for two days, and then told his sister *everything*.

Fannetta gasped, for she had not heard of his *Chicago* affair with the bank. “Oh, brother!” she cried, I’m so sorry for you; but we’ll manage it some way. I must have time to think. Why, *I* could disguise as an elderly woman and go quietly there and bring Elna home with me;” and her eyes brightened at the prospect of a little diversion, and anything to help her brother was her motto at present.

Jerrold had a complete outfit of make-up materials and knew how to use them; so, after a few days’ practice, Fannetta could make up with the best of them. This greatly amused her, and she was anxious to be off for the North and give it a trial. After a week of rehearsing and planning, Fannetta was ready for the start. Jerrold drove her to the stopo (depot), and as they entered the ladies’ waiting-room his heart almost went dead—there was Elna ready to board the same train!

Elna had sold their home and everything in *Chicago* and gone home to her parents in *St. Louis*. Her father had gone to *Chicago* and carried her back home with him. She had just been down to *Shreveport* to visit her sister there, and was now returning to her parents in *St. Louis*. She

had a short letter with her that she was going to mail on the train. In this letter she told Jerrold where he could find her if he cared to, and that he must come on there for her and make amends to her parents for the shabby way he had treated them—by not even stopping off there and paying them a short visit when they went thru there on their way to Chicago the year previous.

Jerrold was so delighted to see his wife and his daughter, *Elnece Selda Hopkins*, that she had no further misgivings about his loyalty to them. "Elna, meet my sister Fannetta." "Sister, this is my beloved wife, Elna." The two women were soon clasped in each other's arms and clung to one another like lost sisters just reunited.

"A thousand welcomes, sister Elna. I've always wanted a sister, and now I have one—and I'm so proud of her!" and all the old Hopkins love and pride shone in Fannetta's soft purple eyes. She saw at a glance that Elna was quality itself, and she knew from every line of her beautiful and refined face that she was well-bred and came from a good ancestry.

"And I'm so glad to meet my new sister, Fannetta, for I never had a sister nor brother of my own; but now I'm just going to love you to death, and oh! but won't we make Jerrold toe the mark?" and Elna reached over and wound an arm around his neck and kissed him playfully.

"We certainly will, sister—he will have *two* bosses from now on," said Fannetta, affectionately.

"You're *both* wrong—I'll have *three* bosses—you've overlooked *Elnece*;" and he sighed happily.

"I guess he's right," said Fannetta as she took Elnece in her arms and petted her. "I just feel that we will all be under her spell," continued Fannetta.

"No, indeed, sister; I don't believe in spoiling children—it's the greatest unkindness you can bestow upon them. I think they should be treated with plenty of *love* and all kindness, but they should not be spoiled by letting them have their way about everything and by letting them have everything they *want*;" and Elna looked almost as dignified and savage as the precise and aged spinster superintendent of a girls' reformatory.

"No doubt you're right, sister," admitted Fannetta, "but it will be awfully hard to be strict with such a sweet and bright little elf as my *niece*;" and she again squeezed the child to her heart, and the little rascal seemed to understand, for she reciprocated the squeeze with compound interest.

Jerrold bundled them all in the car, and they were soon out to his old plantation, and Elna and Jerrold were very happy, and to be back

again in his old home and boyhood haunts on the dear old plantation was indeed Heaven to the cashier; and Fannetta's happiness was no less than his. Elna was also delighted.

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW LIFE.—THE CAPTAIN'S FRIEND.

Everything on the plantation took on a new life. Even the grass and foliage seemed greener. Jerrold took hold with a master hand and everything prospered under his management. He was a new man. His regeneration seemed complete. Fannetta and Elna became inseparable, and everything ran along with the utmost ease and harmony. Little Elnece grew into a beautiful and talented little girl, and they all loved the child and fairly worshiped her; but it took the little one a long time to get accustomed to the negroes. There were about fifty negroes on the Hopkins plantation, and they all liked Jerrold and Fannetta, and when they learned what a rare and talented musician Elna was, they swore by her. They called Elnece "*the little White Missus*," and fairly worshiped the tiny speck of fragile humanity. Everything ran along nicely for about six months, and then events began to happen—the events that made this story possible.

We will now go back a bit and take a little trip with Mr. Ralvert Stacy Chase, the detective. We left the persistent gentleman in Auckland, New Zealand. He was side-tracked for five weeks on account of a broken leg. As soon as he was able, he again took up the long trail with the tireless and unerring accuracy of a Southern bloodhound. After he had traced the cashier to New Orleans, he had also learned that the young man had sent back every penny he had *borrowed* from the bank. Of course this would make no difference so far as the law was concerned, but, as Mr. Chase was something more than a man-trailer, it made a big difference to him. He had a strong sense of elemental justice running thru his soul, and he believed in giving every poor devil a chance—if he deserved it and if his conduct indicated that he was wanting to reform and make good. Mr. Chase was a brave man and also a gentleman, and, knowing of Jerrold's beautiful young wife and little daughter, he failed to see the necessity of soaking him just because the "*law*" permitted it. He communicated with the bank and asked if they still desired his arrest and punishment. He waited a week and received a long letter from the bank officials and a check for ten thousand dollars for expenses.

"Yes, we want you to follow him to the end of time and bring him in—we are determined to make an *example* of the cuss for the benefit of others. Remember, you won't get the reward unless you bring him in;

besides, if you lay down *now*, your reputation as a detective will be ruined. Keep right after him till you get him—even if the trail leads you to the very *gates of Hell*. Put on asbestos garments and go right in after him.”

“Some letter—some savage!” mused Ralvert to himself. “Well, I hardly know what to do. I dislike to pinch the poor fish now that he has made good all his defalcations and has gone back home and evidently intends to settle down and cut out the wild cereal business; and I’d hate awfully to break that poor little wife’s heart and disgrace his innocent little baby girl; of course, if he had not sent back the money nor reformed, it would be different; but *now*—well, hang it! I hardly know what to do;” and he mused long and hard. His official duty urged him straight ahead, but *something else* kept pulling him in another direction. He had never before been on a fence so high he dared not jump off on either side.

After a week in New Orleans, Mr. Chase learned about the land deal and that the cashier had taken passage up the *Red River* on the *Water Lily*. That meant that he had gone home—to see his folks. Mr. Chase did not know anything about Jerrold’s misusing the \$75,000 his father had given him for the land purchase; neither did he know anything about the romantic manner of Jerrold’s courtship and marriage. He learned in New Orleans banking and cotton circles that the Hopkins family was one of the oldest and wealthiest in the State.

“Well, in two more days the *Water Lily* will start up the river again for Shreveport, and I think I’ll be a passenger. It is more than likely that the captain will know Jerrold and his people, and I feel sure I’ll find a gold mine in the good old captain—in the way of information. The old rivermen soon know everyone along their routes that’s worth knowing—and many that aren’t even an asset in the steerage. Well, let’s see—what character shall I assume?” mused Ralvert to himself. “I think I’ll be a young *author* looking for color and new materials for my stories. *My stories!* ha, ha! that’s rich. The only stories I ever wrote were my reports to my employers, and they were too near the truth to be interesting; but, hang it! I have always wanted to be a writer, and as I have a wide and liberal education, I believe I could succeed in that field; anyway, I’m just going to have a try at it, for I’m tired of this business of trailing the weaklings of my own species. A detective has no business to have any such troublesome thing as a *soul*, and as I can’t quite get rid of mine, and the cussed thing insists on growing, I think I’ll get out of the nasty business entirely;” and so he mused for the next couple of days while he was waiting for the up-sailing of the *Red River* boat. Mr. Chase provided himself with plenty of writing materials and sketching pencils, etc., for he

was also a very fair artist. He always carried a Corona typewriter with him, and that would do for his writing. He had on two occasions visited the *Authors' Club* in New York, and had often visited similar clubs in Chicago and elsewhere. He had among his intimate friends in Chicago several prominent literary men and women, and he often went with them to their club meetings—just for no particular reasons whatever—he had an inherent taste for literature and things literary. The knowledge he thus gained was *now* an *asset* in the manner of their dress and their ways and habits; so it was an easy matter to rig himself out in the proper regalia of a successful young author—out looking for color and materials.

“Oh, yes; I must have a good title for my story and everything ready so I can talk about it glibly—if the occasion arises,” he said to himself. “Let’s see—what shall I name my maiden effort?” and he laffed and studied deeply for nearly ten whole minutes before the right idea came. “Ah! I have it! ‘*A Romance with a Splinter in It.*’ That’s fine and will make them laff as well as gasp.”

At last he was ready, and so was the boat. The *Water Lily* left her wharf in the Crescent City at 1:40 p. m. Friday, and slowly chugged her lazy way up the Mississippi and *Red* rivers to the quaint old town of Shreveport. Ralvert remained on deck and at once fell to studying the scenery and making numerous sketches. He seemed oblivious to everybody and stuck to his sketching. The boat had about forty-five passengers this trip, but the number would increase after she got in the *Red River*. The news soon spread that a handsome artist was aboard and absorbed in sketching everything on shore or in sight. A grizzled old planter from near Vicksburg told Captain White about his artist passenger. “Well, Melvin, I’m glad we have some talent aboard, for these trips are generally so colorless. If we have some musicians and artists or authors or any kind of an unusual critter aboard, it helps mightily with the entertainment of the crew. After awhile, when Benson relieves me, I’ll go down and make the gentleman’s acquaintance and see what kind of a pirate he is;” and the Captain laffed at his own joke.

In the course of the late afternoon Captain White and his friend, the old planter, went down on deck and soon found the “*artist*” and a crowd of curious admirers. The artist paid no attention to them, and to the finer-grained ones this was a polite hint that he did not care for company.

The old Captain went right up to the young man and said, politely and bruskiy: “Stranger, I’m Captain White, the owner and skipper of this little craft, and this is an old friend of mine, Major Melvin Moulton,

of Vicksburg;" and he reached out his ponderous hand and fairly jerked the artist off his pegs.

"Glad to meet you, gentlemen;" and he clasped their hands in a manner that told them he was no weakling, but a game bird.

"Come up to my cabin, youngster," invited the old river lion, "and I'll give you something that will make your brush a *rainbow*;" and he slapped Ralvert on the back in that hearty and blustering way of the old-time rivermen of the Southland.

"All right, Captain; lead the way. My name is Chase—R. S. Chase, and I hail from Brooklyn, New York. Like all members of my tribe, I like *color*."

"Ah! you're the right sort, Mr. Chase," admiringly admitted the Major. "A little of Captain White's nectar will fill your soul so full of *color* that every minute will be a *rainbow* and a *sunrise*;" and they all laughed at this poetic observation.

"Ah! fine, Captain, fine!" and Ralvert smacked his lips like a connoisseur and a *gentleman*. A bishop couldn't have understood and appreciated the Captain's nectar and its highbrow *quality* any more than the young artist did.

"You're a real *gentleman*, son;" and the Major slapped his back a resounding thwack and laughed in subdued thunder tones.

Ralvert knew these old Southerners and knew how to play their music and games. "Well, I ought to be—my dad was an old-time Virginian and large slave-owner befoh the wahr, and I am his only son;" and the young artist drew himself up proudly and looked the two elder men defiantly in the eyes and never batted a lash.

"Well, shiver my timbers, Major! but I picked the youngster for a game bird and a *gentleman*, and you see that old Jarvis hasn't lost his vision yet," said the Captain.

"Right you are, Jarvis, I knew the boy was no damned *Yankee*—it's no trouble at all to tell a *gentleman* if he is from the South." And thus they talked and imbibed *color* until the whole universe was an *iridescent rainbow* with a kaleidoscopic background.

Ralvert pretended to drink a great deal, but did not—just enuff to give himself the right ring, but not enuff to become intoxicated. He was now a favorite of the Captain's and the Major wanted to adopt him before the boat reached the *Red River*. That night at dinner the Captain gave Ralvert the seat of honor just to the right of his seat. This was the highest distinction the Captain could bestow on any of his guests, and he usually bestowed it on some lady—especially if she were a fine

musician and weren't so stuck on herself as to be tiresome. Next to the nectar that painted landscapes in the brain, the Captain liked music and a good story. "Ladies and gentlemen, this youngster is Mr. R. S. Chase, of Brooklyn, New York. He is a talented author and artist and a particular friend of mine," said the Captain by way of introduction. The passengers all bowed politely and cordially, and Mr. Chase was soon a favorite with them all. And when they found that he was also a skillful pianist and brilliant conversationalist, he became a lion.

When the Captain took the wheel again at 8 o'clock, he invited Ralvert to come up and sit with him and he would point out all the interesting places on the river, etc. This was just what the youngster desired—it would give him an unsuspected opportunity to pump the old alligator as dry as a Bryan plank.

"Take that big easy rocker over there, Chase, and help yourself to the smokes."

"Thanks, Captain—you're a connoisseur of cigars as well as of the proper drinks for a *gentleman*;" and Ralvert lighted up a sure-enuff Havana and lazily blew the fragrant clouds of smoke at the full and soul-teasing moon.

"First trip in these waters, youngster?" and the Captain blew a cloud of the fragrant smoke at a couple of Opelousas mosquitoes that insisted on following the boat.

"Yes, this is my maiden trip up the *Red River*, but not to New Orleans. No place like the dear old Crescent—eh, Captain?"

"You've said it, Chase; it's more than the New York of the South—it's the *Paris* and *Rome* of America, I think. Know anybody in Shreveport?" and again the Captain bombarded those two persistent mosquitoes with tobacco smoke.

"No; I don't know a soul up in this territory and I don't want to—just want to be let alone and be free to knock around in my own way and pick up new ideas incognito."

"Right you are, boy. Shreveport has some mighty fine people. I had an old-time friend up there, Colonel Jerome Hopkins, but, like all flesh, he recently passed away;" and the Captain tried hard to keep back the tears.

"Too bad, Captain, but we all have to go some time;" and the youngster looked properly sorry. "I suppose he left a family to perpetuate his name and fortune?"

"Very little; one of the finest girls that God's sun ever shone on, and a boy—about your age I guess—but Jerrold was a little wild at

college and has been a little weak since; in fact, it is pretty well understood among his intimate friends that the young man's conduct is what killed his father; and only a couple of weeks ago his mother followed her distinguished husband to the grave;" and again the Captain wept visibly.

"Too bad, too bad. But perhaps the boy—what did you call him?"

"Jerrold," supplied the Captain.

"Will now brace up and help his sister to steer the old family craft," finished the artist.

"We all hope so, for Jerrold is really a fine boy, but a little weak and inclined to be a little—ah—*sporty*;" and the Captain looked relieved now that it was out.

"That's nothing; many of our greatest statesmen and men of letters and art have been quite wild in their younger days and sowed enuff cereals to supply a *breakfast food* mill in Battle Creek!" and the artist looked like an authority on such matters.

"I have no doubt you're right, Mr. Chase, and I'd be so pleased if you knew young Hopkins. You might be able to help him—to give him the right viewpoint of life and its responsibilities and its possibilities. I wish I had the time to carry you out to the Hopkins plantation and introduce you to the young mistress, Miss Fannetta Moss Hopkins, and her impulsive young brother, Mr. Jerrold Jofton Hopkins; but I won't have the time. However, I'll write you a letter of introduction to the young people and that will put you in right, and I hope you'll stick around awhile and maybe you can give young Hopkins the very hand he needs. His sister is the sole heiress to the vast Hopkins estate. The Colonel was so provoked at Jerrold for his wild ways that he cut him off entirely and left it all to Fannetta. Some fish there, Mr. Chase, if you happen to be a single man and are in the market. Fannetta is one of the best the sun ever shone on and she has no weak spots in her make-up like her brother has. Perhaps the old planter did a wise thing in leaving it all to the girl. Of course she will help her brother anyway, and it may be best that it is so arranged that he cannot fool it away;" and the Captain lit a fresh cemetery bolt and looked for those mosquitoes again.

"Very much obliged to you, Captain, for offering the letter, and I might find some good material right there for my next story;" and the author also started another necropolis peg going. "About how much of a fortune did Colonel Hopkins leave to his interesting dauter?" asked the artist carelessly.

"Fully a million and a half," proudly exclaimed the Captain; "but

Fannetta would be a fortune to any man even if she didn't have a cent," enthusiastically continued the Captain. "She's a real, *100 per cent* girl, my boy, and I wish the world had more like her."

"What escapades was young Hopkins mixed up in?" asked the author indifferently—more as a means of keeping the Captain talking about the Hopkins family.

"Well, I don't exactly know what it was—the usual calico escapades, gambling debts, etc., I believe."

"Oh, pshaw! that's nothing; almost every young fellow at college does those things if he has any pep about him;" and the artist shrugged his shoulders to indicate his ideas about the matter.

"I'm glad you feel that way about it, Chase, for I hardly think the old planter treated his son right. I'll write that letter for you tomorrow, and I shouldn't be surprised if you find plenty of color and material about Shreveport."

"Well, as I'm sleepy, I think I'll turn in. Good night, Captain;" and Chase went to his room and enjoyed a very good night's rest and had some very pleasant *dreams*—no, not exactly about the *cashier*.

Chase was very sociable and friendly with Captain White, and long before he reached Shreveport he had the Hopkins family history down Patrick. The *Water Lily* docked at her wharf in Shreveport about 4 o'clock Monday evening, and Captain White accompanied Ralvert up to the hotel and cordially introduced the youngster to the landlord, who was a personal friend of the Captain's. Then they started on up to the postoffice together, and just as they were entering Jerrold and Fannetta were coming out.

"Well, what luck!" boomed the Captain. "Jerrold, meet Mr. Chase, of Brooklyn. Mr. Chase, shake hands with Mr. Jerrold Hopkins—and meet Miss Hopkins;" and the Captain did the introductions in his grand old style of cordial courtesy and highbrow dignity.

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Hopkins, and you, Miss Hopkins;" and the brother and sister cordially acknowledged the introductions.

"Mr. Chase is a friend of mine and has migrated down here to God's country looking for color and materials for his next story," explained the Captain with pride as he familiarly slapped the author on the back; "and what's more to the point," went on the Captain, "he's a *real* gentleman—a Virginian, and his people are all Southerners and of the best. I assured Mr. Chase that Shreveport would be able to supply him with plenty of color and materials for his romances;" and the Captain luffed in his hearty way.

"Oh, how romantic and interesting—a *real* author amongst us!" and Fannetta's face brightened up and tried to do a Marathon with the *rainbow*. "I'm so glad to meet you, Mr. Chase. Are you musical, too?" and she gave him a look that made him forget that he was an officer and had a warrant in his pocket for her brother's arrest.

"W-h-y, really, Miss Hopkins, I—"

"Hang it, youngster! tell 'er the truth. Of course he's a musician, and had my passengers all locoed with his rare music and singing," boomed the Captain again.

"We're awfully glad to hear that you are also a musician, Mr. Chase," went on Jerrold enthusiastically. "Sister and I are very fond of music, and my *wife* is just a maniac about it; so I know we'll be congenial, and I already have a comradely feeling toward you. I hope you'll come out to our plantation and make us a long visit while you are in these parts," cordially invited Jerrold, and at the same time looked at his sister for a second, and she readily agreed and joined her brother in the invitation to visit the Hopkins home and plantation.

"I thank you all very much for the invitation, and as soon as I rest up a couple of days I shall be pleased to visit you all," returned the author, with a steady look into Fannetta's deep purple eyes. She returned his look with a little interest, and could not help showing with her face and eyes that she liked the author.

"Mr. Chase, I have to drive in tomorrow evening for some supplies—couldn't you be ready to go home with me then?" and Jerrold gave the detective a look that had *brother* written all over it.

"W-h-y, yes, I reckon so," he assented.

"Very well; then I'll call at the hotel about four o'clock tomorrow evening, and if you are ready then, we can get home in time for dinner;" and the cashier looked real happy.

"I'll be ready," was the response; and then they parted, and the Captain walked back as far as the hotel with Ralvert.

"Didn't I tell you that Miss Hopkins was a *real* girl?" asked the Captain, with a happy smile on his face, for he saw that Jerrold and Fannetta *both* liked young Chase, and he didn't need to ask the author if he liked the Hopkins children—he could read it in his face.

"Captain White, I'll have to admit that you're as good a judge of women as you are of *drinks*;" and they both laffed pleasantly.

CHAPTER XI.

AN AUTO-DEBATE.—THE "AUTHOR'S" VISIT.

The Captain and the author then parted, and Ralvert returned to the hotel and went to his room—to *think*—and THINK. "Oh, Hell! what bum luck! Here I've traveled most of the world over trying to catch young Hopkins and arrest him and thus bring disgrace on him and his. He's returned all the money he helped himself to and has *reformed*. At last I've caught up with him and am introduced by one of his friends as a *gentleman*, and he and his beautiful sister receive me as a *gentleman* and cordially invite me to their home as an honored guest—and I'm a damned *sneak*—a coiled serpent in their path, waiting to fasten my toxic fangs in their flesh. Ah, bah! Damn the whole *detective* business anyway! It's no calling for a *gentleman*—it's a blackguard's trade and I'm only a sneaking *tinhorn* sport. But what am I to do? I've got to make a decided move, and very shortly at that. That damned old Shylock in Chicago wants his pound of flesh, and if *I* don't get it for him, some other *ferret* with a keen nose and no morals will. What shall I do?" and he went and stood before the long French mirror for fully ten minutes and viewed himself from every possible angle. Then he slipped his hand in his breast pocket and pulled out the "*warrant*." He read it over and over, and then he saw Jerrold behind prison bars and his innocent wife and sister bowed in shame and deep disgrace. Could he do it? Then he shut his eyes as he lay down on the soft and downy bed—and just tried and tried to see a way out of it; but all he could see was *Fannetta's* soft and beautiful face and her coaxing purple eyes inviting him to come and be their guest and share their hospitality—thinking all the while that he was a *gentleman*, instead of a professional sneak seeking the downfall of her beloved brother.

He lay perfectly still for about ten minutes, until the knocking on his door by the porter, who said: "Sup-puh is ready, suh." He jumped up and with a cold towel tried to get some of the redness out of his agitated face, but it only got redder. "N-o-o, I won't go down! I'm not a bit hungry anyway; that is, not for *food*." In about a half-hour he rang for the "po-tah" and ordered a box of the best Havanas the house afforded and a big pitcher of ice-water and a quart bottle of their best champagne. "That will be all, po-tah. No, I don't want anything to eat;" and he shut the door. In about five minutes the "po-tah" was back with the liquid supper and necropolis bolts. He tipped the "po-tah" a 50-cent piece and tossed off two glasses of the divine potation without even slowing down for train-orders, so to speak.

When the "po-tah" got back downstairs with the other colored servants, he remarked with a smile: "De gem-men up in fohteen is suhtenly de real goods—he tipped me foh-bits an' Ah toted a quaht of de boss's best shampain an' a whole box of de house's best Hervanas up ter him."

"Ah, g'wan! Yuh jest speech'fyin'. Le's see ther foh-bit piece;" and old Mam 'Liza gave him a look of incredulity.

Four-bits was some real money to those Shreveport niggers in those good old days—" 'foh de wahr."

The author soon grew mellow and oblivious under the Lethal influence of the landscape-painting nectar. He went out in town and tried to get interested in a play, but he couldn't keep his mind on it at all. When it was about half finished he went for a stroll, and after walking a couple of miles returned to the hotel and retired for the night. He ate a late breakfast the next morning, and then knocked about town and picked up more information about the Hopkins family—but it was to their credit. It seemed that Jerrold was the only one who had ever kicked over the traces. Everyone spoke well of the young cashier, barring his few little escapades at college. Chase was certain now that the people of Shreveport did not know of the Chicago affair, and he made up his mind right then and there that *he* would not be the one to spread the mal-news. "Damn the detective business anyway!" he mused over and over again to himself that day as the beautiful and smiling face of Fannetta kept coming between him and his "*duty*." and then he recalled Jerrold's cordial reception of him and how gladly and quickly the young cashier had invited him to be their guest, and with what shy and ill-concealed pleasure Fannetta had seconded her brother's invitation. "No, I just can't do it; besides, I'm going to win Fannetta if I *can*, and I'm just conceited enuff to believe that I can. From what Captain White tells me, she is heart-whole and fancy free. In that case I'll have a fair start, and if I can't win her, I'll know that I don't deserve such a rare prize. She would just fit my soul to a *t*, and she is the first girl I ever met that just suits me; and then look at the wealth she has. If I did my '*official duty*' by pinching her brother, that would spoil everything; besides, what good would it do anybody to incarcerate the poor cuss in Illinois' dirty hoosgow *now*? Merely to gratify the vanity of that old \$-chasing Shylock in Chicago. I have no doubt but what he'd be in the stir himself if he had all the law provides for his way of getting money." And so his thots ran all day as he knocked around and sized up the sleepy old Southern town and drew down many a sweet smile from the pretty maidens of the town. Mr. Chase was a fine and athletic young

man of 170 pounds and 5 feet and 10 inches tall. He was a trained athlete in boxing, fencing, wrestling, running, riding, shooting and gymnastics. He was well balanced physically as well as mentally, and it is no wonder he was such a favorite with the girls. He was also popular with his own sex and a good mixer.

About an hour before Mr. Chase met Jerrold at the hotel he destroyed the "*warrant*" and then felt much better. "There!" he mused to himself as he watched the last bit of the fatal paper go up in smoke; "I'm no longer a sneak masquerading in the garments of a *gentleman*—I'm no longer a hunter of my *own* species—I'm no longer a coiled serpent in the path of man!" And thus he mused and as he looked at himself in the long mirror. "I'm going to be a real *author* now, instead of a cheat and a sham. This great *love* that has come to me all at once has overwhelmed me—has regenerated me and made a *man* out of me. The next time I shake Jerrold's hand I'll feel like a *gentleman* as well as appear like one. No more will my soul call me on the carpet and call me 'coward,' 'sneak,' 'tinhorn,' etc. The next time I'm Captain White's guest and he so proudly places me at his right and proudly introduces me to his guests as his friend, I'll not have to be ashamed of myself *internally*."

"Tap, tap!" on his door. "Mis-tah Chase, young Marse Hopkins down in de lobby and wants to see yuh;" and the colored bell-hop made a low bow.

"All right, boy—here's a quarter for you—tell Mr. Hopkins that I'll be right down; also take this suit-case down with you." Chase had his grip and suit-case all packed and ready, and had destroyed all his credentials as an officer of the law—had purged himself forever of the last stain.

"Safety first," he mused to himself as he came tripping light-heartedly down the broad and winding old stairway—so characteristic of the old-time hotels thruout the Southland. "Ah! glad to meet you again, Mr. Hopkins;" and the two young men clasped hands warmly.

"All ready, Mr. Chase?" and Jerrold led the way out to the waiting car.

The "po-tah" and bell-hop soon had the baggage properly stored and Jerrold threw in the clutch, and away they spun out of town and followed the muddy old *Red River* for several miles before they swerved off to the north. They soon reached the old Hopkins plantation, that stretched away back from the north bank of the *Carnation Rio*. A couple of negro servants were on hand to carry in the guest's luggage and the supplies that Jerrold had brought from town.

“Ah! good evening, Mr. Chase; come right in, and welcome to our home;” and Fannetta held out to him as soft and white a little hand as he had ever seen, and the kick that was in it came from her soul. He recognized it and met it in kind with a little interest thrown in for good measure. Then she introduced him to Elna, Jerrold’s charming wife. Elna gave him the same cordial welcome, and he gasped when he saw how charmingly beautiful she was.

After an excellent dinner, they all adjourned to the big, old-fashioned parlor, and when Mr. Chase’s eyes beheld a grand old *Chickering* piano, they fairly danced. Elna was the first to play, and then she, Fannetta, and Jerrold sang a song they all knew. Then Fannetta played some soft and dreamy old love-songs that found where the young author kept his heart. Jerrold played and sang a solo with the guitar. Then Mr. Chase had to perform, and he soon had them all captured by his music and singing. The evening soon and pleasantly passed away, and Mr. Chase was shown to his room—a big southeast room on the second floor, and oh, the way Fannetta and Elna had it dolled up! He thot he was in fairyland. And oh, what beautiful and wonderful dreams he had. “Will they ever come true?” he asked himself.

The next morning, after a late breakfast, they indulged in a couple of hours at music, and then some tennis. Mr. Chase was simply delighted with everything, and such genuine hospitality he had never before met. And oh, what a wonderful old place—what flowers and vines, and great, stately trees, with their quiet primeval dignity. And the acres and acres of berries and orchards, and the vast fields of snowy cotton as far as the eye could reach! The old Colonial mansion stood on the north bank of the river, and a great gravel walk festooned with vines and flowers led from the little landing at the river’s brink to the house. The house was about 400 feet back from the river, and this arbor of grapevines, rose bushes and morning glories extended the entire distance from the landing to the great porticoed porch, over which the soft Southern sun danced thru the vine-latticed screens. The Hopkins had a nifty and classy little yacht, on which the young people coursed up and down the river in the evenings when the moon was poetically drunk in all its soft and tangled glory. They carried their small instruments, violins, guitars, banjos, and mandolins with them, and the boat had a very fine new Steinway piano—an upright. They played, they sang, they dreamed, they fished—and *loved*. Jerrold was crazy about Elna and little Elnece, and they dearly loved him, and Fannetta was the only girl in the world to them; and she was simply crazy about them.

"I never saw such happy mortals in all my life," mused Chase to himself after he had been there two days. Not a discord. "I'm so glad I burned that cussed warrant and destroyed all evidence that I used to be a hunter of my own frail species. Never again!" He wouldn't have arrested Jerrold *now* if that young man had murdered the President and swiped the *League of Nations*.

In all their little excursions Ralvert and Fannetta would pair off and Jerrold and Elna would do the same. It was plain to a blind man that Ralvert was insane about Fannetta and that she was crazy about him. He only intended to stay a couple of days, and here more than a week had sped by, and still he dallied and pretended to sketch and write. It is true he had quite a real story well started and managed to work on it an hour or so every day, but Fannetta was the BIG STORY that was holding him a willing prisoner; and she had no "*warrant*"—except her smiles; no handcuffs—except her love.

What puzzled him most, now that he felt sure of Fannetta's love, was how to chuck up the case against her brother without letting the truth out of the bag. And it wouldn't do to let old Fenners know that Jerrold had returned to Shreveport. "Never! I'll just take a trip to New York and write him from there, and tell him I've traced the cashier to that city of wealth, piety, and crime, and that he has so cleverly covered up his tracks I can't find any trace of him. I'll pretend such humiliation at my defeat that I'll resign and tell him I've embarked into another line of work—that I want no more detective work in mine. As he's spent so much money on the case, and as he has back all he lost thru the cashier, he may consider it best to drop the case." So Mr. Chase announced in two more days that he was called to New York by his publishers, but might return later—"If I feel sure I can find some more *color* hereabouts."

That last night of his stay at the plantation he said to Fannetta just before they reached their landing: "Miss Hopkins—Fannetta, I mean, I wish I could always remain in this delightful spot. Hang the publishers and such pesky things!"

She blushed modestly and exchanged looks with him that needed no words—words would have been a cruel profanation. Each *soul* recognized the other—and *surrendered*. "Then *why* not do so?" and with her face bathed in that deep and carnation glory which only LOVE can impart, she gazed steadily into his soul—and *waited*.

"Oh, Fannetta! my own love—my only life, is it really your dearest wish that I remain and be wholly yours—your soul-mate, your husband?"

"Yes, Ralvert, just that, and it will be the happiest and proudest

moment of my life when I can call you 'husband' and endow you with all my vast and exhaustless love;" and she found herself in his arms and in just the right position for the sealing kiss—that *Vast and Forever Soul-Kiss* that makes the grave a joke.

"Ah! little sweetheart—precious!" he cried; "your kisses are the kind that have put all the *color* and *music* and *beauty* in life and rainbowed it with an *Immortal Dream*. I'm the happiest man in all the world and I owe it all to you."

"When they reached the house, Fannetta and Ralvert announced their engagement and received the cordial congratulations of Jerrold and Elna.

"But, dear Ralvert, you must stay here three days longer, and then I'll let you go to that horrid old New York to see your publishers and to wind up your affairs back there, for when you return to me I'm never—no, *never* going to let you go away again. You're to be *all mine* and I shall not let any other woman even look at you," stipulated Fannetta.

"All right, little sweetheart; that is just the way I feel about you, and I'm going to live for *you only*. I think I can wind up my affairs back east and get back here inside of a month; so you can go ahead and make all your arrangements and be ready for the event when I return," said Ralvert, with his soul doing the *altogether* in his steady brown eyes.

"And you must write me a long letter *every day*," exacted the little witch, and her wonderful eyes could not be denied.

It was thus arranged and the next three days were indeed perfect ones to the four youngsters. Ralvert and Jerrold had become fast friends, and this greatly pleased Fannetta. The three days soon wore away and Ralvert bade his fiancée good-bye and took his leave of Elna and Jerrold.

"Well, sister, I think you have picked a winner," said Jerrold that evening as he and his sister were returning from driving Ralvert to the stopo in Shreveport.

"He's the only man in all the world, dear brother, and I'm so glad that you and Elna like him. Oh! we'll all be so happy—won't we, Jerrold?"

"I see nothing in the way of it," returned Jerrold, with enthusiasm.

"And you and Elna must not think of running away because he is going to be a member of our family. There is plenty of room here for us all, and I just couldn't do without you and Elna and little Elnece. Oh, brother! I'm so glad you found Elna—she's such a wonderful little woman—and, oh, her music! The place would be dead without her;" and she squeezed her brother's arm and sighed with happiness.

CHAPTER XII.
THE RAINBOW'S END

Ralvert went direct to New York by rail, and from there sent in his resignation to his employers in Chicago. He sent a brief letter to the Detective Agency, resigning and giving as his reason his failure to get track again of the cashier after tracing him to New York; also, he had decided to take up another line of work—writing stories, etc. This letter caused chagrin and astonishment when it reached the Agency in the Windy City.

“Well, I’m sure surprised to hear that Chase has turned writer; but I’ll bet a few ducats that he succeeds at it,” observed the manager of the Agency after reading the letter a second time. “This is the first time he ever failed to bring in his man; but it’s just as well that he didn’t, for the old banker told me yesterday that they had decided to drop the case against their cashier, as the boy had replaced all the money and \$50,000 besides thru not knowing that the \$50,000 he left with his wife when he fled had been returned to the bank by the little woman; and as the expenses of Chase in chasing the cuss pretty much around the globe only totaled up to \$20,000, the cashier’s wife has a credit of \$30,000 on the bank’s books. They have communicated that fact to her people in St. Louis; so she’ll get back that much of the \$50,000 her husband left with her when he fled,” explained the manager to his partners.

Ralvert also dispatched a letter to the bank president, saying that he was unable to find the cashier, and also informing that individual that he had given up the pursuit and had quit the detective business entirely. “The money you advanced me for expenses has just covered the expenses, and as I failed to capture him, you don’t owe me any salary; in fact, we are even to date and are quits,” concluded the detective in his letter. This letter, however, never reached Mr. Fenners, for he got drowned the day before in a Wisconsin lake where he was summering and fishing. When Ralvert read of the banker’s mishap, he merely smiled and quoted: “Vengeance is mine.”

Ralvert went to Chicago in a week after sending in his resignation, gathered up his personal effects and settled up a little business there, and then went to Minneapolis; he remained in the Mill City three days, and then went to Omaha and rested two days in that near-righteous city, and then departed for Denver; here he tarried five days, and then went direct to Fort Worth, Texas; one day there, and then two days in Dallas; then direct to Shreveport, disguised as an old woman. He took all these precautions to prevent the Agency or anyone else from tracing him to

Shreveport—in case anyone was trying to do so. Of course, he did not know at the time that the case against Jerrold had been dropped, and he was more than anxious to protect the boy against any trouble that might come to him. He remained a full week in Shreveport in his old woman disguise, and made sure that he had not been shadowed, and also made certain that no detective was nosing around there from Chicago. Then he called Jerrold and told him he had just got back to town. This was Saturday morning, and Jerrold and Elna drove in during the afternoon and carried him out to the plantation as their guest. He asked Jerrold not to tell his wife or sister of his arrival. He remained out at the plantation till Monday, and then Jerrold and Fannetta drove him in and he took lodgings at an obscure boarding-house. On Thursday of that week he and Fannetta were quietly married out at the Hopkins home, and Jerrold and Elna seconded them. A quiet week's rest at the Hopkins home, and then the four of them took a wedding trip and a vacation combined to New Orleans and back on the Hopkins yacht; and oh, what a happy time they had! They sang and played and fished and loved and dreamed, and were gone a little more than six weeks.

While in New Orleans they all went and looked over the timber land that Jerrold had recently purchased. "That's a mighty fine piece of land and I advise that you hang on to it," said Ralvert to Jerrold and Fannetta. They both agreed to do so, and five years later they sold the tract of 6,000 acres for \$2,000,000. Valuable oil had been discovered on it. When Jerrold returned home, he had about \$145,000 in cash.

Two years after Fannetta's marriage Jerrold and Elna went up to St. Louis to visit Elna's parents, and they persuaded Ralvert and Fannetta to go along and make a vacation out of the trip. They all went on the yacht and surely did have a real time.

While in St. Louis, Elna drew the \$30,000 with interest out of the Chicago bank, and that happily severed the last string that bound them to the Windy City. It was about seven months after Fannetta's marriage that Ralvert learned that the case against his *brother-in-law* had long ago been dropped. The last shadow thus passed away, and he considered that he had more than *won* the case. What do you think about it, my readers?

Ralvert devoted his time and talents to literary work, and in less than five years he had earned more than a *million* with his pen—"And this is so much better than being a continual sneak and trailing my *own* species—to their ruin." Mr. Chase wrote some very clever *detective* stories, and his former experience in that field had furnished him with

plenty of material for those stories; but the great *Goddess of LOVE* had made him so happy that he preferred to write *love* stories.

The two happy couples lived together, and Jerrold acted as the superintendent of the plantation, and Ralvert just wrote and wrote and made Fannetta an ideal husband. Once every year they would all take a jaunt to the Crescent City on their yacht, the *Red Wing*.

Ralvert and his beautiful wife were always happy, and had two beautiful and perfect children, which greatly enhanced their happiness and helped to exalt their lives.

Mr. Chase attributed all his great success and happiness in life to two things: LOVE and HAPPINESS. These two *unseen forces* gripped his *soul*, changed his ideas and ideals, and directed his footsteps in the *right* direction—the *flower-path* that leads to the *top*.

THE END.

DR. NOBODY FROM NOWHERE.

CHAPTER I.

About the middle of September, 1887, a quaint and picturesque-looking individual blew into a small California city of about twelve hundred inhabitants. An old-fashioned Indian summer had just set in and the air was soft and delicious and had a balminess and hazy far-offness that caused one to wander to the woods and streams—just to dream and *live*, and forget all else. California has a brand of hazy Indian summer weather that gets in the blood and writes *vers libre* on the *soul*. Business is impossible when these Indian summer germs get in the blood and begin to wireless the soul. Even a real-estate shark forgets his ferocity and hunger and becomes almost *human*. When one is under the weird spell of these whispering *primeval breezes*, he loses his claws and fangs and becomes a poet and troubadour, and every tree and vine and wind-swayed bush reaches out to him with soft and unseen hands, and he feels the sweet and sacred thrill of *universal brotherhood*; his whole being is now *en rapport* with all the hidden forces of the universe, and the delicate tints of flowers and their indescribable fragrance can now commune with him—their wordless language is now understood, and eloquent. His *soul* is now beckoning the whole world to come and get acquainted—to clasp his outstretched hands and visit thru his mind. He slips off into the deep and silent woods to be *alone*, but the *whole world* comes and sits with him under the big cypress and banyan trees, and he feels their unseen arms about him. Happiness? Ah! it is too tame a word. Joy? Not much better. The human language is so poor at times—and this is one of the times. The little vine-clad city, with its quaint old buildings and gardened homes, nestles along the soft and dreamy Sacramento River. Where it requires little effort to make a living, people naturally get lazy and *dreamy*.

This quaint and picturesque individual came riding slowly down the valley one afternoon in September, and after riding slowly around town for an hour on his big yellow stallion, he drew up at a hitching-post on a side street toward the river and dismounted. The animal was as picturesque and unusual as its master. It was a descendant of the beautiful and picturesque wild horses that used to roam the Sacramento Valley before the coming of the White Man—with his *blistering "civilization."* *Syphilization* would be nearer the truth. These wild and primeval horses were long and rangy—lithe and sinewy with the gracefulness and poise of the

tiger, the alertness of the Indian, and the pride and wild dignity of the mountain ram and the imperial eagle. Their movements were poetry melted in music. They were exceedingly clannish and kept to themselves—disdaining all efforts of the common Mustangs to sociability and fraternity. The wild Mustang is a mongrel—evidently a cross between a bob-cat, a tarantula, a cactus, a prairie dog, a rattlesnake, a buzzard, a Greaser, an arroya, a Russian thistle, a sand-bur, forty-rod whisky, yellow fever, and the *Devil*. These other magnificent horses were an indescribable tawny shade, with black feet and a dark red star in their foreheads. They were the aristocrats of the equine world, and refused all social recognition to the proletarians or *bourgeoisie*. These splendid creatures possessed a high degree of intelligence and loyalty. They were very swift and could outrun anything that went on legs—even the jack-rabbit was a tinhorn when compared with a *Valgus*—the old Aztec name for these weird and unusual animals. The Aztecs had a legend that when an Aztec hero died in battle defending his tribe, the *Great Red Father* (Azteron) provided his spirit with a *Valgus* for his journey to the Happy Hunting Grounds or “*Great Valleys Beyond*.” If the departing spirit had a *Valgus* for his Pegasus, there could be no such thing as an enemy following and overtaking him. The *Valgus* was their *Charon*, it seems. How this *Strange Man* ever came in possession of a *Valgus* was never known. The animal was a magnificent specimen of its kind and a stallion. The *Valgi* have been extinct for more than a thousand years, and few people, even among scientists and ripe scholars, ever heard of these weird and romantic animals.

It was about an even toss-up between the Doctor and his strange mount as to which received the most attention from the sleepy natives. They had never seen such an animal, and seldom such a man. The Doctor was about thirty-five years old in his stocking feet, 6 feet and 9 inches tall, and weighed about 220 pounds. He wore a long and poetic-looking moustache and a wide-rimmed and rakish-looking pearl gray hat with a wide band that was a soft sumac red. His features were rugged and regular, with a rather prominent nose and a large mouth with moderately full red lips. His eyes were a dreamy shade of tawny hazel, and his face always bore a soft and quiet smile. His teeth were perfect, and his hands were rather long and slender, but had the quickness and strength of a panther. His hair was like the tawny twilight of a Cuban moon as it shimmers out across the harbor in September. His hair was long and came down to the saddle as he sat his *Valgus*, and it would be hard to differentiate it from the tawny mane of the *Valgus*. He wore a long Prince Albert coat of soft and hazy gray material, trimmed with a soft shade of

sumac red—the same color as his hatband. His trousers and vest were of the same materials, and he wore very high and rakish-looking boots of a soft gray leather. His trousers were tucked in his boot-tops. He wore long gray gauntlet gloves. Around the wrist end of his coat sleeves were five stripes of braid; four of these stripes were the same shade of red as his hatband, but the center band or stripe was a tawny yellow. Above these stripes were three red stars of the same shade of red. He wore a flannel shirt made of the finest materials, of a deep cherry red and embroidered with gold lace, a big wide and soft rolling collar, and a big silver gray tie, on which sparkled and gleamed a magnificent canary diamond that was 7 karats and perfect.

After dismounting, the Doctor put his arm around his horse's neck and caressed the splendid animal and rubbed his face against the animal's face; then, after receiving the same affectionate caresses from the *Valgus*, he reached over and whispered something in the creature's ears, and it actually smiled and nodded its understanding and assent. Then he walked lazily across the street and entered a big saloon and gambling- and dance-hall. These places were plentiful in those good old days. The Doctor bowed with a smile to the bartender as he seated himself at a table. He wanted a bottle of their best wine and a dozen of the best cigars the house afforded. He tossed a \$20 gold-piece on the table, leaned back, placed his feet on the table, slowly sipped the wine, and then lighted a cigar and lazily blew fantastic rings of smoke toward the ceiling. He seemed in a deep reverie and utterly oblivious to his surroundings and the attention he was receiving from the *habitués* and chance business men who dropped in anon to slake their ever-recurring thirst and exchange current gossip. The Doctor paid not the slightest attention to any of them. He was enjoying himself in his *own* way—why should others not do the same? Cigar after cigar drifted away in smoke—and with his fancies or dreams. At intervals he would pour himself another glass of the sparkling wine, and between puffs at his Perfectos and Havanas he easily sipped the dream nectar with all the languid and lazy indifference of a Spanish grandee at his *siesta*.

"Who the blazes is ther critter, Joe?" whispered the boss to his bartender.

"Search me, Tom; ther *hombre* just rode down ther valley on er big yeller stud-hoss, hitched ther critter over yander, and then blew in here and ordered ther best ther place has. He's sure er distinguished-lookin' cuss anyway, and he tosses double eagles erround as tho they were only marbles!"

"Here, bartender! bring me another bottle of that *dream stuff*, and

a whole box of those cigars to dream with it." The Doctor slammed down another twenty yellow-boy and lazily raked in the change from his first purchase. Then he gracefully tackled the new goods, and it didn't require a clairvoyant or a ouija board to discover that he had a thirst and liked good tobacco. He continued to thus enjoy himself for about an hour, and then lazily got up and sauntered out. He stowed the cigars about his clothes, but left part of the wine in the bottle on the table.

"Fine day. Come again, stranger," waved Tom Dean, the proprietor, after him as he departed.

"Si, *senor*. *Adios*." That was all, but it was said so gracefully and with such an air of kindness that the stranger was at once voted the "right sort" by the bar-flies and *habitués*.

The Doctor next entered a grocery store and purchased half a dozen apples and a sack of lump sugar. Then he proceeded to *Rex Valgus*, and, with one arm around the steed's neck, he fed the apples and sugar to the animal. Then he rode to a livery stable and made arrangements to have *Rex* (King) taken care of in the best style the place afforded; he unsaddled *Rex* and personally gave the creature a rubbing or hand-massage. Then he inquired of the proprietor of the *horck* (livery stable) where the best hotel was and who ran it.

"It's back about two blocks from the Square, and the Widder Melvin and her two darters run it," warmly explained Jack Masters. "By ther way, stranger, be yew goin' ter stay with us long?" asked Jack, more as a means of getting acquainted than anything else.

"Perhaps. Don't forget what I told you about *Rex Valgus*. *Adios, senor*." And before Jack could come back with a side-step or a left-swing, the Doctor was on his way to the hotel.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOCTOR LIKES THE HOTEL AND—

The Doctor lighted a fresh cigar and lazily walked toward the hotel. He soon arrived and climbed up on the big southeast portico that was covered with vines and redolent with the fragrance of millions of flowers. He helped himself to a big rocker and proceeded to smoke and inwardly enjoy the quiet and beauty of the place. It was one of those old-fashioned Colonial houses with wide porticos and almost buried in a wilderness of tangled vines and flowers; and thousands of birds flitted about and poured out their souls in joyful songs. It was on a high bank overlooking the soft and quiet river, and the clear and sparkling waters reflected the soft and soul-teasing moonlight all over the place. It was an ideal place to dream

and love, and the Doctor, like all other mortals, was not averse to the love-game—when he had the right partner.

After about forty minutes on the porch, the Doctor's reverie was broken by the soft and plaintive notes of a guitar that was accompanied by the sweetest and softest alto voice he had ever heard. He realized at once that a master hand was playing, and the voice belonged to an artist—or an *angel*. Dr. Nobody threw away his cigar, brushed the ashes off his clothes, and listened—like a bird that is being hypnotized by a snake and is powerless to fly away. There was something about the music and the voice that made Doc's whole being sway in unison with it. The more he listened the more restless and nervous he became. "O pshaw! this won't do. Why, Doc, old boy, you're getting as nervous and sentimental as a squaw!" He laughed at himself and started to light another Perfecto, but just then the draperies at one of the big French windows parted softly and a *petite* and beautiful girl of slender and aristocratic mould stepped out on the veranda and continued to play and sing as she eased over to a big divan near the front of the porch. She seemed oblivious to the Doctor's presence and kept right on with her music. She could not have helped seeing him and smelling his cigars; and yet she seemed utterly unaware of his presence. She appeared to be about eighteen years old and had the most wonderful hair of the darkest and richest brown, and great purple eyes that were softer and more brilliant than any moonlight. Her features were perfect, and her face had a sweet girlish wholesomeness and a quaint and quiet dignity that made her very graceful—and desirable.

Doc listened like a fascinated bird, and grew more nervous and found it difficult to restrain himself. "If she would only speak or do something to give me an excuse for butting-in; but, confound it! she just sits there like a fairy and sings on as tho she were the only mortal on earth. I wonder who she is? Lordy! but she's a beaut—with the accent on every syllable." After quite a long time, she switched her music and began to play an old Spanish love-song that Doc knew well and liked. Here was his opportunity. He first began to whistle it and kept perfect time with her playing and singing.

"Ah! I have an *audience*—have I not?" she inquired politely at the end of the verse she was singing.

"Not much of an audience, I guess, *senorita*; but, if you will pardon my enthusiasm, I should esteem it a great favor if you will continue that song and permit me to help you," said Doc, with all his Old School gallantry and politeness.

"Certainly, *senor*; but before we proceed I should like to know

whom I have the honor of entertaining;" and she looked straight at him, but did not seem to see him at all.

"Ah! certainly, senorita; I am *Dr. Nobody from Nowhere*;" and he swept her a profound bow and continued to look his admiration.

"Oh, indeed! and *I'm Miss Somebody from Somewhere*, and I like cute people above everything else in this dreary old world."

Then she proceeded with the song, and the Doctor chimed in and sang in a clear and musical tenor that romped beautifully with her weird alto. After she had sung the last verse, she continued to play it as a solo, and he chipped in and whistled it with her. Then she played a number of other pieces with the skillful touch of the master, but he was just as expert with his whistling.

"Doctor, you are some musician all right. Do you play any instrument?" she queried.

"Oh, yes; I drum a little on a few. If you will lend me your guitar, I'll play you a few *chords*," answered the Doctor.

"Oh, certainly! here you are, *Doctor*;" and she passed over the instrument.

Then Doctor Nobody turned himself loose and for an hour she never heard such wonderful playing. He also sang a few songs and the girl was carried away by his music.

"Doctor, I should like to hear you play the piano," she said.

"I hope to have that pleasure, senorita;" and he again bowed low and gazed his admiration. "You'll excuse me now, senorita, for I must find the landlady of this hostelry, as I wish to secure lodgings and something to keep my ribs apart."

"Oh! and that is it?" and she laffed softly to herself.

"Yes, that is the size of it and explains *why* I happened to come here," he went on.

"Very well—you just remain here, senor, and I'll go and see if I can find mamma;" and she bestowed another soul-chasing smile on him.

"Oh, how jolly! Just to think that your dear mother is the boniface. Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"Just one sister—Mestel. She is two years my senior."

"But that doesn't tell me just how old *you* are nor what your name is?" coaxed the Doctor.

"My name is *Nexel Vestour*. And now, *Dr. Nobody*, won't you be gentlemanly enuff to tell me your *real* name?" and her voice had all the soft and caressing music of the moonlight after 2 a. m. in the valley of the Nile.

"Really, Mademoiselle Vestour, I told you the truth, and I'm sorry you that I was joshing you or trying to be smart;" and his voice was strangely soft and tender.

"But surely you have a *first name*?" she persisted, like a gaunt and hungry mosquito in eastern Texas early in April.

"Oh, yes—but I seldom use it. I just prefer to be known as Dr. Nobody from Nowhere. My first name is *Nefton*, and the last name I never knew;" and a tone of sadness tinged his musical voice.

"Oh, how interesting, Doctor! You don't know who you are nor the names of your parents? Please tell me all about yourself since you have aroused my curiosity," pleaded Nexel, with a soft and caressing tone that few men could resist; and Doc was not one of the few—so he promised to relate his antecedents at some future time.

"Ah! here comes mater now;" and she went forward and met her mother, and then turned and introduced the Doctor.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Doctor, and I hope you have come to locate with us, for the town certainly needs a real physician;" and her voice had a tone of accusation against the local medicos.

"Delighted, madame;" and he made her a low obeisance, and after a few commonplaces he asked if she could accommodate him with a room and board.

"To be sure we can, Doctor; and we'll try to make you comfortable and like the place so well you'll stay with us and help the poor sick people here. Just come this way and I'll show you a room—the big southeast room that overlooks the river and the valley beyond. In the mornings it is flooded with sunlight and is cool and inviting in the evenings."

"Ah! this is something like, madame, and I know I can have pleasant dreams in such a fairy nest. What price per week for the room and board?"

"Ten dollars a week will be about right, I guess;" and she looked him over with ill-concealed delight.

"That will be quite satisfactory, Mrs. Melvin;" and he drew out a well-filled wallet and peeled off a ten-spot, but she refused to accept it then.

"You can pay at the end of the week or once a month—just as you like," she said.

"Very well; any time you want it I shall have it ready."

Then Doc took a bath and shaved himself, and had just finished these little operations when the old-fashioned supper-bell sang a welcome solo. After partaking of a hearty supper of fresh fish and many other

good things, the Doctor strolled into the spacious big parlor and found an old Chickering piano that was almost new—one that was made when pianos were made for *use* instead of for profit. As no one was in the parlor, Doc seated himself at Old Chick and began to dream down the vistas of keys; and oh, boy, but Doc was a dreamer when it came to music! The old hostelry had heard some mighty good musicians, but Doc was a master and his music thrilled everyone who heard it. He wasn't alone long, and in less than ten minutes the room was packed with everyone in the hotel. Even the cook and hotel employees crowded the corridors and rubbered in whenever they could do so. Nexel and her sister soon came in, and Doc was conscious that the former was standing near him, altho he pretended not to be aware of her presence. He soon switched into some of the songs he had heard her play that afternoon, and soon their voices melted together and drifted away thru the valley like perfumed melody on a holiday. They were applauded to the skies, and everybody wanted to meet the distinguished musician and physician. After about an hour, Doc ceased playing and strolled out on the porch and lighted a cigar and proceeded to dream away on the nicotine clouds he sent toward the sky. After enjoying two of the Havanas, he sauntered off about town and took a turn down along the river.

About ten o'clock he returned to the hotel, and after a brief chat with a few of the transient guests, he retired and had pleasant dreams that night—but not about *patients*. Oh my, no! Doc had something more interesting to think about. After he threw himself across the soft and downy bed and the glorious California moonlight flooded his room and he was enjoying the weird and magnetic effect of the moonlight as it wrote *vers libre* all over his sensorium, he murmured to himself—and the moonlight: “Oh, Doc, old boy, what a girl, what eyes, what hair, what a face, and what a voice and form! Yes, she's got me, and I feel like a confounded maverick caught outside the corral; but I never dreamed that any confounded petticoat could put its brand on me—but I'm *branded* all right—and belong to *her!*” Then he got up and looked at himself closely in the mirror for a long time, and at last grunted: “O fool, thy name is *Man!*”

Doc passed a restless night and dreamed all sorts of impossible things, and when he heard the first breakfast bell at 7 o'clock, he bounced almost to the ceiling and was soon in his bath. At ten minutes to eight he entered the dining-room and was greeted by *Smiles*, the dining-room girl, and piloted to a beautifully decorated table near one of the big south windows. Here the soft and soothing Southwind came gently drifting in and at once

put the Doctor in a dreamy mood and scared the tremors out of his pulsing nerves. He at once fell in with the mood of his old pal, the *Southwind*, and gazed dreamily out across the beautiful and lazy Sacramento River and the flower-dotted valley beyond. It was just the spot for the Doctor and had evidently been carefully selected by someone who was also artistic and poetical—and who *might* be interested in the strange physician. Six men and one lady were in the dining-room when Doc entered, and they had all noticed how dainty and artistically the Doctor's table was arranged—and fell to speculating about it. To the Doctor, however, it had no particular significance.

He had just begun on his fruit and cantaloupe when Nexel and Mestel came in arm-in-arm and chatting pleasantly. They seated themselves at the Doctor's table and greeted him cordially, and then the three of them fell into an easy and matter-of-fact conversation that took in many subjects. The Doctor asked many questions about the town and its people, and the young ladies readily gave him a brief history of the place, and when he had finished his meal he knew who was who in Bendville. The two young ladies accompanied the Doctor to the parlor, but he declined to play or sing—"Too early and I never feel very musical right after a meal." After a few minutes, Mrs. Melvin looked in and greeted the Doctor pleasantly and signaled for Mestel to come and help her. This left the Doctor and Nexel alone—just what both desired. This was the real reason the Doctor declined to play and sing—he did not want an *audience* just then.

"Now that we are alone, Doctor, I'm just dying to hear your story—and if I'm rightly impressed by it, I may be lenient and give you a light sentence!" laughed the girl good-naturedly and in a bantering way that only made her more irresistible and desirable.

Doc did like people with a sense of humor and who were smart at repartee—and this time he found an opponent worthy of his mental steel.

"Oh, thank you, most righteous judge! But I fear my story will tax your credulity and I'll get a lifer," laughed Doc in return.

"Court is now in session, senor—proceed." She assumed a dignified air and tapped the floor with her small and dainty foot.

CHAPTER III.

THE DOCTOR'S STORY AND DISCOVERY.

"My earliest recollections go back to the time when I was about five years old. I just recall being brot to Philadelphia by some sailors. Where they got me I do not know. They carried me to a modest little

home in the southern part of the city and left me with a ruff and blustery middle-aged man named Captain Tobin Warren. The Captain was an immense man and gruff, but good-hearted. He ran his ruff fingers thru my long curly locks and said: 'There, sonny—don't be afraid; you're now my boy, and we're goin' ter be great pals.' Then he lifted me up and tossed me in the air like a ball and caught me as I came down. This frightened me, but I was game and would not cry. Then he squeezed me like a grizzly, and from then on I secretly liked him and trusted him. I was hungry, but wouldn't let on that I wanted food. The Captain's eldest sister—Aunt Helen, we called her—kept house for her brother. She was rather indifferent to me at first, but gradually became more friendly, and finally was quite fond of me. The Captain was an honest and blunt man of little education, but he liked me from the start and was always kind to me. He took me with him when he went shopping or about town, or to the parks or theaters. I was crazy about the theaters, and always liked to get down in the first row where I could watch the musicians of the orchestra play. After each performance I surprised the Captain by whistling everything I had heard played. I heard him tell Aunt Helen one day: 'The little cuss is sure full of music, and when he gets a little older I'll take him to a good music teacher and see what can be done for him.' Aunt Helen allowed it would cost some money; but the Captain said: 'It makes no difference—the boy shall have an education.' So when I was seven I was put under the tutelage of Professor Sudendorf, a master of the piano and violin. I learned rapidly everything in the music line, and two years later was given voice culture.

"The Captain carried me with him on several of his trips—once to the Bermudas, once to Buenos Aires, twice to New Orleans and Galveston, and once to Benares, India; also, to Brest and Hamburg. I love the sea—it has always seemed like a mother to me. From the time I was fifteen to eighteen I traveled with the Captain almost constantly, and helped him in many ways aboard the boat—such as keeping his books, writing the log, and entertaining the passengers with my musical abilities and other stunts. On one of our return trips from Palermo we had a famous medical author and professor in the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia as a first-cabin passenger, and as he was a musician himself, he took an interest in me and talked with me as much as he could. He seemed sure I would make a great doctor, and finally persuaded the Captain to put me under his tutelage and he would put me thru the Medical College with high honors. In four years my medical education was completed, and I graduated with high honors and was our class vale-

dictorian. Then I went to Pittsburgh and formed a partnership with another graduate of our class, but after two years we dissolved partnership and I returned to Philadelphia, and after visiting the Captain a few weeks, I booked as medical officer on a ship sailing to the Orient. We went to Hongkong and Peking and back via Manila and Honolulu. I remained with the Ship Company as medical officer for three years, and after our last trip to Melbourne and Adelaide, with a short stop at Auckland, we returned to San Francisco. Here I decided to locate and enter into a private practice. I remained there five years and did quite well, but the wanderlust was hard to get out of my blood; so I traveled up and down the coast and out thru the mountains and got interested in mining, and by a lucky streak cleaned up enuff to put me over on *Easy Street* for the remainder of my days. While in the Far East I got interested in the occult sciences and made a special study of hypnotism, telepathy, mind-reading, voodooism, etc. I studied these things more out of curiosity than anything else. I also studied jiu-jitsu, boxing, wrestling, and all-around athletics. I always was an expert shot, and have a strange sense of hearing that few mortals possess; in fact, I'm quite a freak and lunatic."

"Hardly that, Doctor; but did you ever learn who your parents were?"

"Not a thing about my parents or how the sailors came in possession of me. They just told the Captain I was nobody, and he allowed that would be as good a name as any; so I became known as *Nefton Nobody*, and after my graduation in medicine, I prefixed the medical title, and as I have roamed pretty much all over the globe, and lived but little in any one place, I just annexed the 'from nowhere' for fun and to see the rubes stare and ask questions. I always had a strong sense of humor and easily saw thru the pretensions of people. I soon discovered that the practice of medicine is mostly conjecture and humbug, and if the doctor is foolish enuff to take himself seriously and try to 'cure' sick people by the administration of poisons, he soon finds himself without a practice. I early lost faith in the profession, and never made much of an effort to gain a practice that pays well. I have a wide and deep sympathy for sick people, and have often done them more good with my *music* than with my medicine."

"Excuse me, Doctor, but how in the world could you treat sick people with *music*?" asked Nexel, with wonder all over her beautiful face.

"Easily enuff, when you understand the psychology of sickness. The first thing to do is to get them to relax and soothe them and make them forget themselves and their ailments, and I have been very successful in accomplishing this with my music. It's a great diversion and has a

sedative action on the nervous system. After they become relaxed and diverted and their nerves soothed and quieted, their minds are in a *receptive* mood, and then I can do wonders in the way of hypnotic suggestions. As soon as their minds have absorbed my suggestions and these suggestions are recorded on the *subconscious* mind, I resort to hot baths and massage and cleanse them both internally and externally, and then, with a little judicious fasting and a proper diet and *exercise*, I accomplish good results where years of medication have utterly failed."

"Wonderful, Doctor! Splendid! Bravo! So *music* is largely your *materia medica*?"

"Yes, and it never leaves any bad or *mal* effects."

"Doctor, I have great faith in *you* and believe in your startling methods and innovations—perhaps you might do something for *my* case?" and she looked straight at him—but did not see him with her eyes, for she was totally blind; and yet he had not noticed it.

"*Your* case!" he exclaimed, and he jumped up and glared at her in amazement. "Why, what is the matter with *you*?"

CHAPTER IV.

DR. NOBODY'S OFFICE AND DOOR SIGN.—HIS FIRST PATIENT.

Nexel's calm announcement that she had "*a case*" was the blow that "almost killed father," for he was so excited and blooey about the girl that he had not noticed her critically with the eye of the trained physician. He had studied her more with the bashful scrutiny of the lover, and was only aware of her purity and unexcelled beauty—just the type of a girl that fitted his heart and "palled" with his *soul*; and he was aware that she also liked him. What more did he want to know? She seemed to go about just like the others and seemed to know just where everything was. Since losing her sight she had developed a weird and uncanny sense of hearing and feeling—both with the physical sense of touch and the still more wonderful sense of *intuition* or just *knowing* things without any apparent means of gaining the knowledge. This method of knowing things is called *intuition*, or the *sixth sense*, and is often unerring. It is generally more highly developed in women than in men, and is always stronger in blind persons. It is one of Nature's delicate methods of compensation. His every nerve was tensed and every ganglion (*telegraph station*) sizzled.

"Why surely, Doctor, you know I'm *blind*?" and she looked into his eyes—and *beyond*.

"Never dreamed of such a thing; you don't indicate it in any way, and there is absolutely nothing the matter with your eyes or general health," he declared with conviction.

"That's what the greatest of your profession have told me after making minute examinations of my eyes and body and brain; nothing, *apparently*, is wrong or amiss, and yet I have been totally blind since my fourteenth year, and I am now nearly twenty."

"A very extraordinary case of '*hlimul*,' as the Mystics of the East term it. It is wholly a psychic or mental ailment, and that is why the oculists and surgeons cannot put their fingers on it; as they are not up on the *occult sciences*, it simply baffles and puzzles them. I saw two cases in Benares, and thru the courtesy of a native priest, who was also a very learned physician, it was explained to me, and I was initiated into the mysteries of its treatment."

"Oh, Doctor! do you mean to tell me there is hope for me—that *you* can restore my sight?" and she came forward and clasped his hands and became almost hysterical.

"Calm yourself, Miss Vestour. It will be a very simple matter to restore your sight—if you will follow my instructions implicitly;" and he gently led her to a big rocker and seated her. "Just be calm now and don't get excited, and in a short while I'll be ready to begin your treatment. In the meanwhile I have many things to do and must be about them. Also, not a word of my autobiography to a soul. I don't know *why* I was ever presumptuous and silly enuff to confide my private affairs to *you*, but as I have done so, I shall expect you to honor my confidence by keeping it all under your hat. *Au revoir*, Miss Ves—"

"No, no; just call me *Nexel*—please do, Doctor."

"Very well, *Nexel*; and now I'm just *Nefton*—when *we* are *alone*."

"Yes, *Nefton dear*, everything shall be just as you wish;" and she ran away like a frightened fawn—not even colliding with the furniture.

The Doctor then went around to the hork to say good morning to Rex and see that the animal had been properly cared for. Everything was O. K. at the barn, so he soon found a small empty store building on a side street and that faced the south and the river. He rented this for his office, and soon had it furnished and an excellent new piano installed. Then he got a drayman and went to the stopo, and had quite a load of stuff carted to his office and a big trunk and several other pieces of baggage carried to the hotel. In addition to the new piano he bought in Bendville, he had a rare old violin, a very fine guitar, banjo, mandolin, cornet, trombone, harp, clarinet, accordion, and harmonica—and he was

a master on all of them. He had a big collection of music and quite a library and a wonderful electrical apparatus. He had a Winchester rifle, a double-barreled shotgun, two big six-shooters, a sword, two Bowie knives, and a complete gymnasium outfit for exercising and training. The Doctor was an all-around athlete and could pull an oar with the best of them. He was a crack shot, expert at tennis and golf, could play croquet or poker equally well, and when it came to swimming, the fish had nothing on him; and when it came to jumping and running, a kangaroo or a jack-rabbit had to get up before breakfast to even get a look-in. He was a telegrapher and well up in law and astronomy. He was a strange and accomplished cuss and did not know how he learned so many things. Learning just came natural to him—like swimming does to a duck. When he moved in he had quite a crowd of boys and idlers hanging around and watching the process with curiosity. He soon had his stuff all moved in, and then he went to the court-house and registered as Dr. Nefton Nobody, physician and surgeon:

"That's rather a strange name, Doctor?" pleasantly observed the clerk of the court.

"Nobody thinks so after they get used to it," countered the Doctor. "By the way, what is your name, Mr. Clerk?"

"Gray—*Red* Gray the boys call me for short. My first name is *Reding*, but everyone calls me *Red* for short."

"Well, Mr. *Red* Gray, *Nobody* hasn't anything on you when it comes to strange names. As I rather like freaks and odd names, I hope we'll be friends."

"I hope so, too, Doctor. Have you a *specialty*?"

"Oh, yes; I'm a hobby-nag in almost every way. My specialty is restoring the sick to health without *poisoning* them."

"Well, good luck to you, Doctor. There's room here for a doctor that's different from the others."

"*Adios, Senor Gray.*" Then Doc went to the hotel and did full justice to one of "the Widder's" famous dinners.

Sing Woo had learned of their strange and talented guest, and being a musical fan himself, felt a kinship for the Doctor. Woo had laid himself out to get up dainty and delicate little dishes that would appeal to the Doctor's palate—and succeeded.

"Smiles, who is the cook here?" he asked the waitress just before leaving the dining-room.

"Sing Woo. Why do you ask?"

"Because he knows how to cook—with a master spoon."

"Oh, thank you, Doctor! I know the Chink will appreciate that, for he is not a common Chink, but more like a high-brow or a mandarin. We all like him, too, and I don't know what we would do without him. He's crazy about music and your playing changes his yellow face into a Celestial map, and his sandaled feet just go blooey when you touch Old Chick," rattled on Smiles, for she was very sociable and also liked Doc.

Nexel did not appear at the table while the Doctor was there, but she was softly dreaming on Old Chick when he strolled into the parlor. He thot he could enter and sit down and drink in the sweet melody of her music without her knowing it; but he soon discovered it was impossible to fool her in any way. She had an uncanny way of knowing things that even exceeded his own marvelous powers. She played on and pretended she did not know he was present, and then she said, without turning: "Come, *Nefton*, and sing with me." He sat perfectly still and tried to make her think he was not there—but it was no go. "Oh! I know you are there, dear—I knew the instant you entered, for your eyes sent a *wireless* to my soul. Never try to deceive me, dear—for you cannot do so."

"Wonderful girl! Oh, I'm so glad I've found you, Nexel! and tomorrow I'll be ready to begin your treatment;" then the Doctor went over and stood close to her and laid his hand reverently on her pretty tangled hair. She thrilled and blushed with joy; then she reached up and clasped his hand in hers and pressed it to her lips, but said nothing—very eloquently. Then they drifted off together in an old love-song they both knew and liked. Their voices were tuned together by Nature and never made a discord. Then the Doctor looked at his watch and said: "I'll have to be going now, dear Nexel, for I'm moving in my office and shall be very busy the remainder of the day." He tangled his fingers for a moment in her beautiful whispering hair—and then was gone. She continued to *dream* on the piano and think of—well, you can guess at her thots just as well as I can, so I'll not waste the time guessing for you.

Doc went by the hork and stopped long enuff to say "Howdy?" to Rex and pet the proud and sensitive creature a little. Doc never neglected nor abused Rex. The man and horse were pals and comrades. The magnificent yellow stallion was attracting almost as much attention as the eccentric physician himself. Doc soon arrived at his office, and proceeded to unpack and arrange things as he wanted them. He was very precise and temperamental and everything had to be just so. Even the sagging or tilting of a picture the hundredth part of an inch would tantalize his goat. After everything was disposed of to his entire satisfaction,

he went in the back room and soon had a neat sign ready for his front door. This sign was a headliner on the program that was destined to shake the sleepy little town from its deep reverie and make it sit up and gasp. Doc was a humorist of the grim and ironical kind, and often played pranks on himself "just to see the *natives gasp*," as he termed it; and this sign, or "*shingle*," as the doctors usually call their business sign, was well qualified to yank a few gasps out of the wildest of them. Even Tom and Joe and Sing Woo could not get by it without using up a few choice gasps. The Doctor was also a very clever artist, and soon had a sign ready that was high up in the bird class. We'll just give it verbatim and let our readers judge for themselves:

DR. NOBODY FROM NOWHERE.

"Quack Doctor."

Right under this remarkable sign he sketched three skulls, and then printed this ironical observation under the skulls:

"They Never Come Back."

When Sing Woo read the last line, "They Never Come Back," he chuckled in his peculiar Celestial way and remarked: "Alle same tlutth. They never clum black."

It was late in the evening when Doc got this remarkable sign on his door, but he soon had an audience.

"Why such a sign, Doctor?" asked Joe Byers, a merchant.

"Just because I like to tell the truth and want to see if I can make a living without using deception," quietly returned Doc.

This brought immediate applause, and seemed to cover the whole field. Then Doc seated himself at the piano and played for about ten minutes in such a masterly way the rubes forgot the strange and *truthful* sign and applauded him wildly.

"Now, friends and fellow-mortals, I'm going to lock up my tent and go to supper, but will be back here at 7:30 and remain for an hour and a half. If you want to come back again and get acquainted and laf at me and ask questions, all right—I'll try to accommodate you," he said, and proceeded to carry his words into effect.

Promptly at 7:30 Doc was back at his office and so were most of the citizens, including two of the three local physicians. The crowd amounted to more than a thousand people and was in good humor and unmercifully guying the other two doctors.

"Why don't you two pill-peddlers tell the truth and shame the Devil?" humorously asked Sam Harris, foreman of the only lumber yard in town. This caused a tremendous laff at the two medicos, and as both

of them had doctored Mrs. Harris and the cemetery finished their work, they particularly felt the justice of Sam's irony.

Doc thot a little music would be better than medicine, so he entertained them with his banjo and violin for a half-hour. He received a tremendous ovation and was encored to the sky.

"Dr. Quack, what's the idea of all this music and circus paraphernalia?" sarcastically asked Dr. Glum, with a sneer.

"Music puts people in a happy and receptive state of mind and diverts their minds from their troubles; besides, it is a part of my life and much better than medicines," replied Doc.

"So you expect to employ music instead of drugs in treating your patients?" asked Dr. Fuller, with an ill-concealed smile.

"Largely; and in some cases I get my best results from music. Of course, I employ many other methods—it all depends on the case. I treat all my patients intelligently—I don't prescribe a lot of dope dogmatically for all cases without regard to the case—and then let the cemetery finish the job for me;" and Doc gave Dr. Fuller a look that was a challenge or anything else the physician cared to consider it.

The applause that greeted this last shot of Doc's seemed to be all Dr. Fuller could stand in one evening; so he backed out of the swelling crowd and disappeared.

Dr. Glum wasn't entirely satisfied, so he tried another shot: "Where'd you come from here?" and he winked at one of the druggists who had just heard of the entertainment and came as soon as he could fill a prescription and lock up.

"From Nowhere," was Doc's prompt answer.

This caused such a big laff at Glum's expense that he edged away and went home, but vowing to "get the damned quack!"

The crowd began to clamor for more music, so Doc entertained them with the piano for awhile, and then a nervous and sickly young fellow about eighteen years old crowded up near the Doctor and stammered out: "D-d-doc-t-t-tor, c-c-can y-y-you c-c-cure m-me of s-s-stut-t-t-terin'?"

"Perhaps; come up here. Stand back a little and give me room, gentlemen, and I'll see what I can do for this poor lad. What's your name, my boy?" and Doc laid his hand gently on the lad's shoulder and looked him steadily in the eye.

"H-h-hen-ry F-f-flem-m-m-ming, s-s-sir."

"Now look me steadily in the eye and don't waver an instant! That's it—steady now." And then Doc placed his left hand on the

boy's back neck, his right hand on his top-head, and gave three quick and peculiar twists, and then said: "You lied to me, boy! you tried to deceive me—you don't stutter at all! Why, you can't stutter to save your life! Do you hear me? I say you *can't stutter a bit!*" Then Doc released his hold on the boy and just laffed at him.

The boy looked bewildered and said: "I sure can't stutter now, Doctor, for *something* in my neck and head snapped and I can talk all right now!" And he grabbed Doc's hands and tried to cover them with kisses, but Doc pushed him away and grabbed up his accordion, and such divine music they had never heard.

The crowd yelled and then looked awed. About fifty of them tried to talk to Doc at once, but he held up his hand for silence and said: "My friends and nabors, I never overwork myself, and now it is time for me to quit and call it a day's work. I'll be at my office at about 11 o'clock tomorrow forenoon, and will then be glad to serve the sick and crippled ones who care to try me. I'll now play a march for you to march out by, and I hope you'll all have pleasant dreams."

CHAPTER V.

THE DOCTOR'S SECOND PATIENT.

The Doctor's remarkable cure of Henry Fleming's stuttering had spread all over the town before noon the next day, and by the time Doc reached his office he sure had a capacity house. The news had reached the Inn before he returned to his room that night, and Nexel was so bewildered and happy she became almost hysterical.

The Doctor went directly to his room, and lay awake in the soft and whispering moonlight for hours thinking, thinking—and *dreaming*. He was thinking of deep brown hair and purple eyes—eyes that looked but could not see. How provoking to fall desperately in love with a girl—and not know that she was blind! "No, I *must not* fail and I *shall not* fail!" whispered Doc to his own soul. There was too much at stake to even think of such a thing as failure. Thus far the Doctor and failure had been strangers, and he had no intention of meeting Monsieur Failure now. The thot of it was bitterness unbearable. "I must restore those beautiful orbs to their normal function, so she may see my face and so our souls may commune and play tag with each other," and Doc finally drifted away into *Slumber Land* with that one idea obsessing his *subconscious mind*. "I think I know where the whole trouble is," mused Doc to himself, "and after I have a talk with her mother, I'll be ready to begin on Nexel."

Doc was up at 7 o'clock the next morning, and had breakfast with Nexel as usual. She intuitively knew just when he would be in the dining-room, and they met at the same table. When they were thru with their breakfasts, Doc asked the girl to go and send her mother to him in the parlor, and for her to keep away until he sent for her. "Also, see that no one disturbs your mother and me during our conference. After I am thru with interviewing your mother, I want you to come to me in the parlor, and I'll then be ready to begin my treatment of your case, Nexel, and remember, *I'm going to restore your sight*. Keep that one thot in your mind to the exclusion of everything else."

"All right, dear; I'm under your orders and shall be a good soldier," replied Nexel. Then she tripped out, and soon brought Mrs. Melvin to the parlor; she then remained outside to prevent others from intruding on the Doctor and her mother.

THE INTERVIEW WITH MATER.

"Good morning, Mrs. Melvin!" greeted the Doctor.

"Good morning, Doctor. I hope nothing is amiss?" responded Mrs. Melvin.

"Everything is quite all right, madam. It was about your dauter I wished to question you."

"Oh! And do you think you can do anything for the child? The greatest oculists and specialists in Frisco have utterly failed and they all declare the case is hopeless," explained the mother despondently.

"Never mind about the failures of the great specialists, Mrs. Melvin; one of the greatest things they have done is to make big mistakes. They know a great deal—but most of it isn't so. The poor simps have a dogmatic creed that must be upheld at all costs—to their patients. If they only had nerve and sense enuff to discard all creeds and let *Mistress Truth* be their only *authority*, they'd soon get out of the *Boob Class* and leave their footprints on the shifting sands of Time," said Doc cheerfully.

"Well, I hope you are right, Doctor; for it would be the one great joy of my life to have my little girl's sight restored," sighed the poor mother brokenly.

"Now, Mrs. Melvin, can you recall any very disagreeable experience that occurred during the time just preceding Nexel's birth? Did you have trouble with anyone at that time?" continued the Doctor.

"Why—er—y-e-s, I did, now that your questions recall it," answered Mrs. Melvin.

"Please state the nature of that disagreeable experience."

"Well, it was during the time my first husband was circuit judge of

this district. We had a half-breed girl in our employ as house-girl, or maid of all work, and after she had been with us about five months I began to miss small pieces of jewelry and silver, and at last my expensive fur coat disappeared. Judge Vestour decided to trap the girl and get legal evidence against her before we accused or dismissed her; so I employed a maid to especially wait on me and to nurse me thru my coming confinement. This maid was French and Spanish and spoke both of those languages fluently; in fact, she was a very clever detective. This half-breed girl we suspected was Indian and Mexican, and had great beauty and cleverness, but possessed all the bad traits of both her races. I was about two months along in my gestation when our detective caught Minene right in the act of stealing my pearl necklace—valued at \$3,000. We soon found the coat and other articles she had stolen. The Judge and I both felt it our duty to hand her over to the police and prosecute her, altho she plead pitifully for her release and freedom. ‘No,’ said I; ‘such creatures as you deserve to be made examples of, instead of being condoned.’ My husband agreed with me, and he had the pleasure of sentencing her to five years at San Quentin. After she found her pleadings in vain, she cursed me and said: ‘Ver’ well, hard and hauty woman; I place the curse of the Great Evil Spirit, Roaring Thunder, on you and yours—to the third generation. Your lil’ papoose vill be ver’ butiful and talented girl, but ven she is ze fourteen year ol’—zip—pouf! her lights go out like ze candle by ze vin’! Zis vill be in your min’ all ze time an’ you of’n cry to your Great Spirit to help keep ze curse away, but heem no har your prayers! Ugh! I hate you—to h—!’

“There the officer making the arrest clapped his hand over her mouth and prevented further speech and hurried her away. I fainted and lay in a semiconscious stupor for six days, and then I gradually recovered; but I could not forget the awful creature, and her terrible curse rang in my ears and skulked thru my mind during the entire time of my gestation; and when my little girl was born, and was beautiful and grew to be so talented, I still felt a secret fear and was really afraid the rest of the awful curse would materialize. My husband hooted at the idea of there being anything in it, and the child was just as likely to be one sex as the other anyway, and as for the child being beautiful and talented, that was also perfectly natural. After about two years I had begun to believe as my husband did about the matter. Nexel was so healthy every way, and so happy and bright, we soon dismissed the subject from our minds. When Sheriff Landen returned from taking Minene to San Quentin, he told Judge Vestour one day that the girl had also placed a curse on him and had sentenced him to get hurt on a train and to die of his injuries shortly afterward. Judge Vestour

never mentioned this to me at the time, for he knew it would worry me and revive the old fear of the other curse. When Nexel was nearly five years old, her father got hurt in a railway accident and died from his injuries four months later. Just before he died he told me of Minene's curse and sentence she sent back to him by the sheriff. This almost drove me crazy from fear and dread, for all the old terror and superstition came back in spite of all my reasoning to the contrary. Of course we kept all this from Nexel, and she does not know of it to this day. On Nexel's fourteenth birthday, and exactly at 12 o'clock noon, her sight left her just like the flickering out of a candle—just as Minene had predicted. The child was feeling in perfect health and making preparations for her birthday party to be held that evening. She came running to me and exclaimed: 'Oh, mamma! I can't see—I'm blind!' Then she began to rub her eyes and cry. I called Dr. Frazer, our family physician, but he was baffled and told us the case was beyond his reach. He advised taking her to an oculist in Frisco. We carried her to Frisco and had her examined by six of the city's best eye-men, but they all gave up and admitted they never had seen a case like it. They could find nothing wrong with the eyes nor with her health. Everything, they said, was normal—and yet she was blind and has remained so ever since. After two years I took her to New York and Philadelphia and had her under the best eye-men in those places, but it simply put them to guessing. What puzzles them all is the fact they can find no lesion or disease of the eyes and the girl's health is perfect. Since returning from the East with her, we have given up all hope."

"A truly remarkable case, Mrs. Melvin, but I'm just going to slip another one over on the orthodox boobs, and then enjoy their antics—and denunciation of me as a 'quack,' because I shall not employ any drugs nor any of their antiquated methods," laughed Doc easily.

"Do you mean to tell me that you can restore my child's sight?" exclaimed Mrs. Melvin excitedly.

"Just that, madam, and you don't need to get a bit excited either; these little things of doing stunts that the so-called '*regulars*' can't do are just a few of my diversions and help take the monotonous edge off of life."

"Oh, Doctor! it will surely be a miracle if you succeed."

"There are no such things as miracles, Mrs. Melvin; just the operation of natural laws—that's all; but by those who do not understand natural laws and Nature's mysteries any unusual act that seems beyond human powers is considered miraculous;" and the Doctor laughed pleasantly. "Now, Mrs. Melvin, you go out and send Nexel in here, and you or Mestel remain

on duty and see that I am not disturbed until I get thru giving Nexel her first treatment;" and Doc rose to indicate that the interview was ended.

Soon Nexel came in timidly, but showed no sign of nervousness. "I am ready, Nefton dear, and my faith in *you* is supreme," was all she said, but it was enuff.

Doc took her in his arms and strained her to his heart, and said: "Those dear words of faith and love shall make you whole. A certain subconscious impulse, prenatally imparted, is keeping the blood away from your optic thalamus, and that causes your loss of sight. The *optic thalamus* is that part of the base of the brain where the optic nerves terminate, and it has the power of *seeing*. The optic nerves merely gather up light waves in which images are dissolved, and throw these pregnant light waves on this highly organized brain organ. This part of the brain is well supplied with blood-vessels and is thus kept filled with blood. The brain is a wonderful dynamo and can only work when full of blood. The optic thalamus in some mysterious and unknown way changes or translates these light waves that are brought to it into sight or vision; but if the blood is shut out of the optic thalamus, it can't function at all—'tis the same as if it did not exist. In your case, dear Nexel, this prenatal impulse is diverting the blood around and away from the optic thalamus—and in *effect* you have no optic thalamus. Likewise, if you had a stomach that could not function, you would starve to death. In your case the optic thalamus is there all right, and the arteries that supply it with vision blood are also on duty, but a certain subconscious impulse won't let this vision blood enter the thalamus. Now we must kill that subconscious impulse and plant another one in its place, and then the blood will again flow into the thalamus thru that particular artery, and then your vision will return and you can see—*me*, dear Nexel."

"Oh, double joy, dear Nefton! To see your dear face and to again see my mother and Mestel—and all my little friends, the flowers and birds! I'll be the happiest mortal in all the world—and will owe it all to *you*!" exclaimed the blind girl.

"Now, dear Nexel, that old evil impulse is dying and this sweet new impulse is being born, and in one week from today, at 12 o'clock noon, the *New Impulse* will rule—and your sight will come back as suddenly as it left you. Let this one new idea dominate your subconscious mind, and the Old Impulse will soon be no more. All day and until you lapse into slumber at night keep this New Idea vividly in your mind—both the conscious and subconscious, and all will be well. Now, when I place my left hand to the back of your head and my right one on your forehead, I'll

silently plant the New Impulse in your subconscious mind, and you just relax and yield to the New Impulse. Let your *soul* be ruled by *my* mind and will. Now, ready!"

Then for five minutes the Doctor clasped Nexel's head as above described, and sent a silent wireless from his mind into and thru her subconscious mind. She readily succumbed to hypnosis, and he easily put her in a cataleptic state and thus held her for thirty minutes. Then he released her and held her in his arms a few minutes, until she was fully recovered and her equilibrium restored.

"Oh, Nefton! a sweet and stirring music is pulsating thru my mind, and I feel a great happiness coming on perfumed wings!" cried Nexel joyfully.

"Everything will be all right, dear love, and a week from today you will see. Again tonight about 9:30, and every night at the same hour, I'll give you another treatment until I have given you seven treatments. Keep everything to yourself, dear Nexel—not a word of these treatments to anyone. I want it all to come as a complete surprise to the town," said the Doctor.

"Your orders are my law and gospel, dear Nefton;" and Nexel laid her pretty white hand in the Doctor's strong one and just sighed with happiness—a happiness that words would only profane and bungle.

CHAPTER VI.

A FLOOD OF PATIENTS.—TROUBLE BREWING.

After finishing Nexel's treatment, Doc went by the hork and played with Rex awhile, and then went by the postoffice and got a big batch of mail. He returned to the Inn with his mail and went directly to his room and read the letters and glanced thru the papers. Then he answered some important letters, and then went out on the veranda and with Nexel's guitar he amused himself and the birds until dinner was ready. He dined with Nexel and Mestel, and then repaired to his office. A big crowd was waiting for him and he had plenty of material to work on. Among the afflicted were three stuttering cases. Doc disposed of them in a hurry, and each one was cured and talked easily. Then a case of paralysis was restored like magic; then two cases of cross-eyes were straightened. Next a cancer case presented himself, but was declined. Then two cases of rheumatism were examined and accepted for treatment, and were told to call the next afternoon and he would have their instructions ready for them. One of the local doctors then asked if he could cure consumption.

"It depends on the condition and age of the patient and how far the

disease is advanced," returned Doc pleasantly. "Where is the patient?"

"She cannot be brought here—is bedridden; so it will be necessary for you to go to her home?" announced Dr. Brown. "She lives about three miles out, and I should be pleased to ride out there with you this evening, Doctor."

"Very well, Dr. Brown; I'll close here at 4 o'clock this evening, and if you will have your horse here at that time, I'll ride out with you on Rex."

"I'll be here and ready, Dr. Nobody, and I know you'll enjoy the ride down the valley."

"That afternoon Doc accepted two cases of epilepsy, a case of diabetes, two cases of asthma, and stopped three cases of headache; then a bad case of eczema and an old sore of ten years' running came up. Then ten minutes of music, and the two doctors cantered away toward the west. Dr. Brown had a good mount, but his nag was a Frisco on the Bolivar Branch when compared to Doc's big Yellow Boy. The two men chatted pleasantly on the trip and were soon at the home of Mr. Robert Humley, a wealthy ranchman and mine-owner.

Doc proceeded to examine Mrs. Humley at once, as he was in a hurry to get back to the hotel. He found her very nervous and her liver and kidneys clogged. The lung involvement was only a result of the other ailments, but had been diagnosed wrongly by the old school men. Doc just laughed when his patient tried to impress him with the seriousness of her condition; however, he finally got her to promise to give up all the old ideas about her case and to be guided entirely by him. Inside of a week the woman and her husband were boosting the Doctor, and in about three months he had her well.

This converted Dr. Brown and he at once became a disciple of Dr. Nobody's. Dr. Glum and Dr. Fuller still held back and denounced Dr. Nobody as a charlatan and a lunatic, and several of the ministers declared him to be a *witch*. Dr. Glum and Dr. Fuller saw their practices disappearing and wanted revenge. They were sure sore at Dr. Nobody, but did not know how to get rid of him. They must hatch us some scheme for getting rid of him, or they would have to seek other pastures—where the grass was greener.

"Why, the damned lunatic will soon have all the practice in the town and vicinity if we don't put a crimp in his plans!" exclaimed Dr. Glum to his colleague, Dr. Fuller, that night as the two walked home together after witnessing the performance at Dr. Nobody's office.

"Not a bit of room for two opinions on that subject," returned Dr.

Fuller, with a chuckle that sounded like the death rattle.

"Right you are," continued Glum. "I'll tell you what we had better do—you think of some plan tonight, and I'll do the same, and you meet me at my office at 9 o'clock tomorrow forenoon and we will compare notes."

"A very good idea, Doctor. Good night."

"Pleasant dreams to you, Doctor, and a *nightmare* to Nobody."

Dr. Nobody did some more wonderful work at his office that night after returning from the country; then he went home to the Inn and gave Nexel her treatment. Then they both enjoyed an hour of song and music together, and Doc went to bed with a head full of very roseate dreams. The other two doctors had everything but pleasant dreams.

The next forenoon the two worthies met as agreed upon. Glum was in favor of burning Dr. Nobody's place and hiring some rowdies to drive him from town astride of a rail. Glum not only wanted to get rid of him, but desired to humiliate his opponent. Dr. Fuller allowed that would be a little too raw. He thought a charge of "insanity" might be able to do the trick for them. "It will be an easy matter to get plenty of physicians to testify that the man is demented, and his outlandish methods of conducting his practice, and his own shingle, would go a long way with a jury—especially if we had a few *physicians* on the jury."

"Good!" joyfully exclaimed Dr. Glum. "You are one of the county commissioners anyway, and we could easily get another man that would be friendly toward us," laffed the envious doctor. Then the two rascals consulted with the county officials, and got enuff encouragement to decide them to bring an "insanity" charge against Dr. Nobody.

Little did Dr. Nobody dream of what a storm was brewing for *his* benefit. He arose late the next morning, and after a short canter on Rex, in order to exercise the animal, he lazily strolled over to his office. An immense concourse of expectant people were on hand to greet him, and among them was about every kind of ailment from ingrown toenails and toothache to paralysis and intoxication.

CHAPTER VII.

A MALINGERER.

As soon as Doc opened up, a big burly and brutal-looking thug pushed his way in and ruthlessly shoved a number of women out of his way and claimed to be "first."

"Doctor, I have splitting headaches and epileptic fits and at times go blind for a spell," he declared frantically.

"You look like a bad case!" laughed Doc as he reached for the man's pulse and asked to see his tongue.

"I am, Doctor, and I hope you can cure me. I can get the money to pay you," he continued with eagerness. He had overdone it—was a poor actor, and Doc was "next" instantly. He knew the fellow had been hired by the other doctors to play sick in order to catch him off his guard.

"Oh, yes, my friend, I can easily cure you. All you need is a brisk walk about five miles in the country—and *never* come back. You might also go by Dr. Glum's office and tell the skunk I can handle all such cases he can send me." Then he turned to his auditors and said easily: "My good people, there is nothing wrong with that big loafer and crook except laziness, meanness, and an appetite for rum. He was hired by Dr. Glum and his friends to come here and pretend sickness in order to catch me napping, but it didn't take me long to size him up, as you saw."

The crowd began to look for the big stiff, but he had already commenced that five-mile walk—and was safely out of reach.

This little incident gave the people a new insight into the real character of their local doctors, and only increased their liking for Dr. Nobody. Doc was making good in every case he accepted and his common-sense methods were making history in the Sacramento Valley. People from nearby towns began coming in to see "the new doctor," as they designated Doc. And it made no difference to Doc how poor a patient might be—if they had no money and could not work, he gave his services free. One poor woman lived away out in a little hut on the outskirts of the town, and when she heard of Doc's good work, she wrote him the following letter:

"Bendville, California, October 6, 188—.

"DEAR DOCTOR—I am a hopeless cripple and am also blind. I got injured in a railway wreck six years ago and am blind and paralyzed as a result. I am also penniless and am dependent on the charity of my nabors and a small pension the county pays me. I had some means when I got hurt, but a rascally real-estate agent swindled me out of it, and the courts upheld him of course. I used to teach music and am so fond of music I hope to have the pleasure of hearing you play some time. I know you can't do anything for my case, but I should so much like to hear your wonderful music. I wish you every success, Doctor, for I realize what good work you are doing.

Sincerely,

"MISS BEVNA SLADE."

"Some letter!" mused Doc to himself after reading it a second time. The case was so pathetic it touched Doc's tender spot (*his soul*), and he said: "I'll just take my guitar and ride out there some afternoon and try

to cheer the poor soul with music. Her life must indeed be a sad and lonely one—and a music teacher, too! She writes as tho the flowers had not all perished from her soul yet. Rex needs some exercise and I always feel better after helping my fellow-men. She shall surely hear some of my music anyway, and I have a curiosity to hear her story.”

The next afternoon Doc slung his guitar over the horn of his saddle, and soon he and his beloved Rex were flying towards the suburbs to visit Bevna Slade. Doc soon found her cabin—a modest little affair, but covered with vines and flowers. “She’s sure a woman of refinement and culture, or she would not regard the tangled vines and flowers so highly,” soliloquized Doc to himself and Rex.

The cabin was built partly with logs and partly with stone. It had a small porch and faced the east, and Bevna always sat out there in the afternoons and whiled away the time playing her guitar and accordion. She was a master on both instruments, and also played the piano, organ, and violin. She was sitting out on her porch and softly playing and singing to herself and her little bird friends when the Doctor arrived at about 4 p. m. She heard the hoof-beats of Rex and at once ceased her playing and listened intently.

“Good evening, Miss Slade,” greeted the Doctor pleasantly. “I’m Dr. Nobody, and have called in response to your letter,” continued Doc, with a voice full of *soul*-elements that at once caused Bevna to like him.

“I’m delighted to meet you, Doctor. Please dismount and take that chair there. It was so good of you to come away out here to see me—when you know I have no means of paying you;” and she extended a white and faded hand that still retained traces of beauty and refinement.

Doc grasped her hand and gave her a greeting that at once assured her that he was not in the *Dollar Class*. “Never mind about not being able to pay me with money—there are higher and better rewards than dollars, my poor woman,” he said. “I came because I wanted to see you and because you are interested in music, flowers, and the other things worth while. If I could find no better reward than just money, I would go and jump in the river and drown myself.”

“Oh, I’m so glad you’re not mercenary, Doctor! and it is a pleasure to hear your voice and know that you are actuated by the noblest ideals. The nabors have brought me the most wonderful tales about you and your powers to help the sick and crippled. I could not help writing you, altho I know my case is beyond all human help,” and Miss Slade sighed resignedly.

“Anyway, cheer up and never let the *Star of Hope* set forever. The

fact that the so-called 'regulars' have failed to help you signifies little or nothing. Your eyes look all right and I'm glad there is no mechanical injury to the eyeballs themselves. The trouble is evidently further back and may be caused by some of the wires (nerves) being crossed; and the paralysis may also be due to pressure on a nerve somewhere. * I'll examine you and we'll soon see."

"You may be right, Doctor, for my eyes are not injured and I never have any pain in them; and neither is there any pain in the lower part of my body, and I can *feel* just the same as ever, but I have little use of my limbs and the lower part of my body. My appetite is excellent, my lungs and heart are almost normal, and my mind seems the same as ever. My musical powers seem greatly enhanced. If I could only walk and see again, I'd be so happy!" and her face took on an increased color and she was quite excited.

"You spoke about being swindled out of your property by a real-estate shark—please tell me about that," asked Doc, with interest in the case.

"Very well; if it won't bore you, Doctor, I shall be pleased to relate it, altho I can't see that it will help matters any to tell you about it."

"Perhaps it may help a great deal; anyway, it won't do any harm to tell me about it," said the Doctor.

"When I graduated from the Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati," said Miss Slade, "I was just twenty-two years old. My father then lived on a big farm and ranch up the valley about ten miles. He had 640 acres of good land and it was well improved. Shortly after my return from the East he bought a big house and two lots in town here, so we could move in and I could teach music. Father's health was failing rapidly after mother died, and he thot he could be doctored better if he lived in town. For a period of six years he did little else than doctor, but got no better; in fact, he gradually grew worse and died. About a year before he died he sold the farm in order to get money for the doctors and for us to live on and to keep Elveen in school. She was my younger sister. After father died I settled up his debts and affairs and had very little left—not enuff to keep sister in college two more years; so I went to teaching music, and soon had plenty to do. I was so happy to know that I could now make enuff to live on and keep Elveen in school. I soon had calls to come and teach classes in nearby towns, and on one of these trips I got caught in a train wreck, and that left me as you now see me. I had but little saved up and there was little left from father's farm, etc. The doctors soon got what little I had saved up for Elveen's education,

and I had to have means for my own living; so, after considerable hard thinking and many heartaches, I decided to mortgage our house and lots here in town. It was my last resort to raise money in order to enable sister to complete her education, etc. I applied to Jobert Fossert, of this place, for a loan of \$600 on the house and two lots. He said he would let me have it at 6 per cent interest. He drew up the papers and brot them to me for my signature. I happened to be alone in the house at the time and signed the papers, and he gave me the money then and there. My nurse and housekeeper had gone to town, and I afterward learned that the rascal waited till I was alone to have me sign the papers. About a month afterward I learned that it was a deed I had signed, instead of a mortgage for \$600. The deed conveyed the house and two lots, valued at \$8,000, to him. The deed stated that I had received \$6,000 cash for the property. I brot suit to recover the property, but, as I had no witnesses, it was his word against mine, and as I admitted signing the papers, the court decided in his favor."

"The infernal scoundrel!" exploded Doc. "Where is the skunk now?"

"About three years ago he moved to S——, and I believe he is there yet. If I could only see to shoot, he wouldn't be living any place longer than it would take me to find the coyote!" and she looked like an avenging Nemesis.

"Calm yourself, please. And now I'll make an examination and see if I can't find the trouble. Ah! here it is—the fifth cervical vertebra is slightly dislocated, and that causes the whole trouble. Now get control of yourself while I give the vertebræ a sudden twist. There! Now do you feel like getting up?"

"Oh, Doctor! I can see! Yes, yes, I think I—can—can get up. Oh, glory, Doctor! I can stand—see! see! Oh, thank Heaven for sending you to me!" and she staggered to her feet and slowly walked about the room. Her legs were wasted and very weak from disuse for so long, but she could manage to stand and walk a little. "Oh, Doctor Nobody! how funny everything looks—how beautiful everything is! Oh, how happy I am! Oh, Doctor! will I stay this way, or will I relapse into my blind and helpless condition?"

"Calm yourself and relax, or you may have a relapse—temporarily;" and he laid his hand gently on her head and clasped the other hand on her left hand and for about a minute sent magnetic currents over her nerves. "There! Now if you will be guided entirely by me, you'll be all right in a few days. Now I'll play for you awhile and you rest and relax." Then

Doc tuned up his guitar and played and sang to her for about forty minutes.

"Oh, Doctor! such divine music, and how I thank you for it and for restoring me to health! I'll work my fingers off to pay you."

"Oh, no, you won't, for you don't owe me a cent. This is one of the ways I have of keeping on good terms with my *soul*. Now listen to what I say, for I must be getting back to the hotel: Don't try to use your eyes and limbs too much at first. Just go to bed now and relax and *dream*. Don't eat anything tonight, and in the morning I'll bring a nurse out here, and you just do as she tells you to do. She will simply be carrying out *my* orders. Don't say anything to the nabors till I give you permission to. That's all. Good-night and rosy dreams."

"And *you'll* be about the only dreams I'll have—but that will be enuff!" she called after him as he hurried out to the street and vaulted in the saddle and was gone.

The Doctor got back to the hotel just in time to enjoy his supper with Nexel and Mestel; then he went in the parlor and sang and played with Nexel for about an hour. Then he gave her a treatment and, after smoking one cigar, went to bed. Early next morning he got a good nurse, Miss Nildred Nassen, and got the hork-keeper to drive her out to the Slade cabin. Then he played with Rex awhile, and went down to his office to find a larger crowd than ever. He saw that the crowd was unduly excited, and realized that a storm was brewing.

"Say, Doc, I want to talk to you in private a minute," said Bob Pelton, a big auctioneer.

"Very well, brother; step back this way, please. Well, what's on your mind, my man?"

"Why, Doc, some of the coyotes of this dirty, lousy burg are putting up a damnable job on you, and I thot you ought to know of it."

"Well, spill the beans and let's hear what kind of a plot it is;" and Doc laffed good-naturedly and lighted a fresh weed.

"It's this way: Doc Glum and some of his renegade Apaches are preparing to prefer a charge of insanity against you and have you put in a bug-house—in order to get you out of their way."

"Some scheme, I'll admit; but why didn't they trump up some awful *crime* and charge me with it?"

"Why, they knew you could easily give bond, but with a charge of insanity you can't be admitted to bond at all."

"Well, I'll be tetotally amal gated!" exclaimed Doc. "However, the skunks will have to give me a hearing, and I assure you there'll be a

performance worth seeing," laffed Doc good-naturedly. "Bob, I want you and several hundred of my friends who are in favor of fair play and a square deal to be on hand when the renegades try to put over their little game on me, and I promise you all a lively time;" and Doc grasped Bob's outstretched hand and gave it a shake that was a whole dictionary.

"Sure thing, Doc. The boys are just itching to help clean up that gang of crooks that have been running this town and county so long; and we intend to make a clean sweep of the bunch, too!" exclaimed Bob enthusiastically.

"Yes, I think it is time the town and county were rid of such rubbish, and with your help I'll take the initiative and show them exactly where to step off," and Doc laffed another laff that had internal teeth a mile long.

Bob soon had his men well organized and properly armed, but it was all so carefully and adroitly arranged that the crooks never had an inkling of it.

The remainder of the day was spent in treating patients and playing for them. About 4 o'clock Doc sent a note out to Miss Slade and her nurse by Sierra Pete, and told the nurse to bring Miss Slade to the Inn, so he could attend to her without the loss of so much time. "Never mind about her protests and assertions that she has no means to live at the hotel, etc., for I have arranged for all those minor details, and my orders are imperative," wrote Doc to Nildred Nassen, the nurse. That settled it, and Miss Bevna Slade was soon domiciled in a beautiful room at the Inn, where she could watch the river flow and dream. With a proper diet, hot baths, massage, music, and the financial strain removed from the poor girl's sensitive mind, it was astonishing how rapidly she regained her normal condition. In a few weeks she could go about town, and in three months she resumed her music-teaching, and all the birds in the world sang for her again—thanks for a real doctor who knew his business. Every day right after dinner Doc would have Bevna come in the parlor with her nurse, and then Doc, Nexel, and Bevna would have a music feast for about an hour; and again at night the three of them would just revel in their divine pastime. Then Doc would give Bevna her treatment and send her to her room with Nildred, her nurse and companion. Then he would treat Nexel and—retire to sleep and *dream*. Thus the days passed pleasantly away.

The story of Miss Slade's wonderful cure at the hands of Dr. Nobody soon spread beyond the limits of Bendville and the county. Among the many outside patients who sought the Doctor's services was one coyote

that caused Doc's eyes to do a Seminole war-dance. It came from the erstwhile real-estate agent—*Jobert Fossert*. He wrote that he was paralysed and wanted Doc to come and see him at once.

"I'm a *rich man*," he wrote, "and money is no object if I can regain my health. I'm inclosing one hundred dollars by check to pay your expenses in coming to see me, and if you can help me, you may name your *own* figure; but please come at once.

"Yours for health,

JOBERT FOSSERT."

For some reason or other this letter caused a million birds to sing grand opera in Doc's soul. "The eternal years are mine," quoted Doc to himself. "Here, Driftwood, is a dollar; run over to the stopo (railway station) and find out all about the time of the trains going and returning to S——."

"I'm off, Doc; anything I can do for you will be a pleasure," shouted Driftwood, the Melvin Inn porter and all-around factotum.

Doc left that afternoon at 2:06 for the little town of S——, about forty miles distant.

CHAPTER VIII.

CURING A SKUNK AND TREATING CROOKS AND THUGS.

At 4:20 Doc arrived in the town of S——, and soon learned where Jobert Fossert lived. As it was only about six blocks from the stopo, Doc decided to walk. He found a fairy dream place on a sloping hill and overlooking the winding river. It stood back in about the center of a twenty-acre tract of land that was nearly all in orchard and vineyard—and all around the imposing mansion were flowers everywhere. "Somebody here certainly has good taste," mused Doc to himself as he leisurely walked up the wide graveled walk to the big house. He used the old-fashioned knocker, and was soon admitted by a very *petite* and pretty French maid—Mlle. Minet Valdeau.

"*Oui, m'sieur*, theese ees var M'sieur Fossert leeves;" and she conducted him to a drawing-room that breathed quiet elegance in every piece of furniture and all its appointments were rich and correct—but decidedly French.

"Just say to M'sieur Fossert that Dr. Nobody has arrived," said Doc to the maid before he seated himself.

Minet was back almost immediately, and said: "*M'sieur le Docteur*—theese vay, please;" and Doc was ushered into the rich and elegant sitting-room where Jobert Fossert sat in the afternoons and when he was

tired of the bed.

"Welcome, Doctor. It was so good of you to come at once. Take the seat here, please," said Fossert. "You may retire now, Minet; but be ready to respond if I ring for you."

"Oui, m'sieur;" and with a smart courtesy the maid flowed out of the room, but gave the Doctor a look that said plainly, "I like you, M'sieur le Docteur."

"How long have you been this way, Mr. Fossert?" asked Doc, after taking his pulse and looking at his tongue.

"Just two years, and it came on suddenly, too. I was feeling all right, and was just climbing in my carriage to go to town, when my whole right side went dead and I crumpled up in a heap and sank to the ground. I was carried back into the house and one of the local physicians was summoned. He examined me, but seemed puzzled about the case, and after trying one dope and another on me for about four months, I sent to Frisco for one of the best specialists the State affords. He came and looked me over, left some more dope, sent me a bill for \$750—and that was all;" and Fossert sighed disgustedly.

"Some doctors!" was all that Doc had to say; but he uttered it so eloquently that was quite enuff. "M'sieur Fossert, I can easily restore you to health, and will do so only on certain conditions;" and Doc gave him a look that was a whole library.

"Never mind about the conditions, Doctor; if you can help me, just get busy and do so, and you may name your price."

"Very well, m'sieur; but, as I dislike to treat *skunks*, you'll have to do something to get out of the *Coyote Class* first;" and Doc shot him a look that would smoke the Huns out of No Man's Land.

"Why—er— what do you m-mean, Doctor?" and a look of alarm crept into his rascally face that showed him up in all his saffron hues.

"I mean this, Jobert Fossert: A man who will take advantage of a *blind* girl and rob her like you did poor little Bevna Slade isn't fit to live at all, and ought to be shot on sight; but if you are willing to make complete restitution and live a clean and square life from now on, I'll take your case and restore you to health. The first thing for you to do is to write out a check for Bevna Slade and thus return to her the full amount of her property. That house and the two lots were worth \$8,000, and you let her have \$600. That leaves \$7,400 due the girl, and you must add in 6 per cent interest for four years—making a total of \$9,176. My bill will be an even \$10,000, and must be paid in *advance*; so, m'sieur, if you want me to put you back on the map again, get busy with your

check-book;" and Doc tossed him another look that caused him to reach for his *gas-mask* and tremble.

"Your terms are outrageous, Doctor!" and he tried to look offended.

"Very well, m'sieur—I bid you adieu;" and Doc started for the door.

"Stop, Doctor! for Heaven's sake stay! I'll do as you wish." Then he rang for Minet. "Bring me my check-book and writing materials, Minet."

"*Oui m'sieur*;" and she was gone like a shadow, and soon returned with the bank-book, pen, and ink.

Fossert filled out a check for Miss Bevna Slade for \$9,176, and one for Dr. Nobody for \$10,000.

"It is now half-past five and I won't be able to cash these till tomorrow; so I'll come back up here and treat you soon as I cash the checks tomorrow forenoon. If the checks are all right, I'll soon have you on your feet again; and if you ever pull off another stunt like robbing a blind girl, I'll strangle you with my own hands!" and Doc gave him another look that would make a Robert-cat look like a Sunday-school jack-rabbit.

Then Doc went to the hotel and enjoyed a good supper, smoked an hour out in the moonlight, and then went to bed a very happy man; for now he would be able to complete Bevna's happiness and start her once more on her chosen career with her mind only burdened with a horrible memory—a nightmare that time would gradually shadow into dim and fading oblivion.

Doc was at the bank the next morning soon after it opened, and cashed the checks; then he walked out to the Fossert mansion, and in about an hour had that very much frightened man on his feet, walking. Fossert's joy was boundless, and he had promised both himself and Dr. Nobody that he would be a real, sure-enuff man from now on.

"Doctor," he said, "you have no idea how glad I am to right the great wrong I did that poor girl. The thot of it has always haunted me, and I often think it brought on a mental and nervous condition that caused my paralysis."

"You are right," responded the Doctor; "it was a strong contributing factor, and your wrong diet and other errors in living did the rest. Now that the mental load is removed and a few adjustments made in the *vertebræ*, you'll soon be entirely well again—if you follow my instructions about your regimen, etc. I want a written report from you in thirty days, and if you are not making satisfactory improvement, I'll pay you another visit. Now I must say *adios, senor*, and I feel sure of your physical and

mental *regeneration*."

"Adios, Doctor—and may Heaven bless you!"

Doc caught the noon train back to Bendville, and Bob Pelton and Sierra Pete were at the stopo to meet him.

"Doc, Hell's about ready to bust loose, and Big Best has been hanging around in the vicinity of your office most of the forenoon. We think they have the game all primed and ready and are just waitin' for your return," was the greeting Doc received.

"Very well, boys; you have our friends on hand, and when I give you the signal, jump in, and we'll make a clean sweep of that gang of legal and official crooks. I have no intention of surrendering to them on any of their cooked-up charges. They know they can't make any of their fake charges stick, but if they once get me unarmed and in their clutches, one of those crooked doctors would shoot a needle under my skin, 'to quiet me,' of course, and—well, the undertaker would finish the job. I know what breed of coyotes they are and intend to fight them like a man. Just you boys stand by me, and don't take a hand unless more than two of the coyotes attack me at the same time. I can take care of any two of the yellow polecats at a time;" and Doc's yellow-hazel eyes emitted sparks of gleaming fire.

"All right, Doc; we'll be on hand to take care of the overflow if there should be any."

Doc soon reached his office, and it seemed that most of the town were in waiting—to see the fun, for it had leaked out that the Doctor was to be pinched by the sheriff—Big Best. "Howdy, friends and nabor?" was Doc's greeting to them. He opened his door and the room was soon crowded with patients and sightseers. Doc seated himself at the piano and played "The Marseillaise" with a depth of feeling and a power of defiance seldom heard. Then he asked who was first on the list of patients.

Dr. Glum shouted out this mild one: "Say, Mr. Quack, can you cure a case of insanity—one of long standing, I mean?"

"Just be patient, Mr. Loony, and I'll get around to your case after I finish with the cases that are *worth* saving," answered Doc. This little load of birdshot made the rascal howl like an Oklahoma sand-storm, and brot a big laff from the audience.

Then Dr. Glum whispered in the sheriff's ear, and Big Best stepped forward and said in a loud and blustering way: "I think it's about time I took a hand in this crazy game—Dr. Nobody, I have a warrant for your arrest on a charge of being insane."

"Who swore out the warrant, Mr. Sheriff?" asked Doc.

"Why—er—Dr. Glum and Dr. Fuller."

"Who gave you the warrant and told you to serve it?"

"The county attorney. So you see it is all legal and straight."

"Yes; but the crooks who swore it out and the other idiots concerned in the outrage are not straight, and I refuse to recognize its validity or to go with you."

Then the two rascally doctors, the prosecuting attorney, and five other members of their gang began to close in on Doc.

"Wait a minute, gentlemen; I think I can convince you crooks that you are the ones who have bats in your lofts. Stand back there, all of you, and let's have a little room," Doc called out. "Dr. Glum, *why* have you disgraced yourself and your profession by making such a ridiculous charge against a brother physician?"

"Because I think you are bug-house and the community ought to be protected against such a dangerous lunatic," replied Glum.

"Can you find anyone in this community that has been injured by me?"

"Of course he can't, the dirty liar!" shouted several hundred at the same time.

"As a matter of fact, Dr. Glum, I am daily curing patients that you and your ignorant ilk have humbugged and robbed for years, and you are envious because your *meal-tickets* are slipping away from you."

Here about fifty of the cases Doc had cured or greatly helped wanted to assault Dr. Glum and his dirty pals, but Dr. Nobody asked them to restrain themselves.

"Dr. Glum, you and I are about the same age and weight, and Dr. Fuller is about my age, but considerable heavier; now I propose to fight both of you cowards at the same time—are you ready?" challenged Doc.

Dr. Glum reached for his hip-pocket and Dr. Fuller put his hand toward his coat-pocket, but neither hand landed. Bob Pelton grabbed Glum's hand just in time to prevent the skunk from using a gun, and Sierra Pete and Driftwood grabbed Fuller just as the coyote was reaching for a bottle of nitric acid to throw in Dr. Nobody's face.

"So that is the way you fight, you yellow coyotes!" cried Doc.

Then Big Best started to pull his gat and take Doc in tow, but he was grabbed by several hands and disarmed.

"Boys, hang onto those coyotes, and let's all get out here on the vacant lot back of this building and form a ring. I want to see if there

is a drop of game blood in these yellow birds;" and Doc let out a crow that would make any gamecock green with envy.

A ring was soon formed, and the two doctors, the sheriff, the prosecuting attorney, the crooked judge that helped Jobert Fossert rob Bevna Slade, and three other members of the crooked gang that had been running and robbing the county for many years were led forth and detained so they could not insert their tails between their hind legs and sneak away.

Then Doc skimmed off his coat and vest and put on a pair of thin leather gloves, and stepped into the ring and said: "Gentlemen and ladies, the County Medical Society is now in session, and the first stunt on the program is to ascertain whether Drs. Glum and Fuller have any *red* corpuscles in their blood. Gentlemen, are you ready?" and he gave the two yellow coyotes a look that congealed their blood.

"I don't want to fight a lunatic!" exclaimed Dr. Glum as he steadily changed to white.

"Well, gentlemen, I'm not so particular about the kind of *germs* I combat, and as I have taken the precaution to put on gloves in order to protect my hands from infection, I am now ready to begin operations."

With this Doc made a jump for Glum something like a bob-cat jumps for a hound dog that is trying to come up the tree after it. Glum dodged to the best of his ability, but his inferior maxillary busted Doc an awful one right on Doc's right fist, and then he went down on his head and shoulders to keep from hurting Doc's fist. Fuller tried to break thru the crowd to avoid hurting Doc, but some of the boys who wanted to see a real fight shoved the cur back in the ring and he fell heavily against Doc. Doc just jabbed his left elbow in Fuller's tummy, and he doubled up like a jack-knife and went down to try and find his pal—the valiant Glum. They made a pitiable sight, and the crowd continued to yell and hoot at them to get up and fight like men, but fight was never in them—they only had chicken and rabbit blood. Doc reached down and grabbed each one by his neck and the way he bumped their heads together for about three minutes was a sure-enuff treat for the audience. When he got thru with them there wasn't a sound place on their scalps or faces and their noses and mouths were bleeding freely. Then he slammed the yellow snakes down in one corner and told them to remain there till the show was over.

"Now, boys, let's have two more of the yellow birds—the sheriff and the prosecuting attorney will do for this course!" sang out Doc. "Come on, Big Best—you big stiff! And you, you jackleg shyster!"

Big Best started to do some lively foot-work around the ring, but

Doc made one jump and caught him on the jaw with a vicious uppercut and a left-swing on the ear almost simultaneously. This was all the exercise Big Best needed—so he just went over on the ground and softly groaned. The legal light of the county tried desperately to land a light tap on Doc's face, but a stiff right punch in the solar plexus and a left jab in his right eye caused the legal light of the county to see things in a different light. He had no particular business down on the grass, but he wanted to see how Big Best was coming along in his grassy dreams. Doc was so disgusted that he picked them up and bumped their heads together like he had the two doctors'; then he tossed them over on the two medical lights and politely invited the judge and a banker to come forward and try for the blue ribbon. They turned deathly white and absolutely refused to hurt Doc by fighting him. Doc collared them both and jolted their heads together until they saw all the stars and planets the Designer of the Universe ever made. Then, to finish the entertainment, he laid the two doctors side by side and about 2 feet apart, and then he laid the sheriff and prosecutor across them, and on top of them he piled the judge and banker crosswise—like a pile of railway ties. Then he got up on top of the six human logs and made a little speech to the effect that such crooks were a disgrace and detriment to any community, and should be given a week to wind up their affairs and leave the town and county.

The crowd unanimously agreed to these sentiments, and the six yellow coyotes, with seven others of their band of assassins, were given one week to wind up their affairs and breeze away while the atmosphere was good. Some of them considered a week a very liberal allowance of time, and blew away the next day.

"Now, my good friends and decent fellow-citizens," said Doc in conclusion, "if you will come into my den, I will play a little for you, and then I must get at my work of helping the sick and lame."

This time Doc played the banjo and sang two songs for them. Then until 5 p. m. he did his usual wonderful work with his patients. Then he locked up and placed a secret guard to watch his office all night, for fear some of the defeated renegades might burn him out. He then went direct to the hotel and paid Bevna Slade a visit.

"Oh, Doctor!" cried Miss Slade, "I am so glad to see you and know that you are not hurt! Driftwood and Sing Woo brought us the news of the fight, and oh, Doctor Nobody, but we are all so proud of you! I just feel almost entirely well now that I know that you are not killed nor in jail."

"Thank you, Miss Slade, for your interest in me," responded Doc;

"but it was no trick at all to vanquish that bunch of yellow chickens. They were desperate and would have finished me if I had been foolish enuff to surrender to them; why, Fuller, the cowardly hound, even had a pint bottle of *nitric acid* in his pocket that he intended to smash over my face and head. Glum only intended to shoot me—the tender-hearted and merciful cuss."

"Oh, Doctor! you should have heard Sing Woo tell about the fight," exclaimed Nildred with joy. "He said: 'Hoo-lah! Dloctor flight like Hellee and hlole flull of wild clats; Hoop-lee!' and he did an Oriental dance that had both class and pep in it. Woo's a character all right, and we all like him."

"Yes, Woo's white enuff on the *inside*—even if his skin is a little yellow," Doc replied; and they all laffed a triet.

"By the way, Miss Slade, I had a call to go to a nearby town and treat an old *nabor* of yours, and that is why I had to neglect you a little last night," Doc went on to explain.

"Oh! that was all right, Doctor—but do tell me who the old nabor is?" and a look of hungry eagerness came over Miss Slade's face.

"It was no less an *immortal* than *Mr. Jobert Fossert*, and he is quite a changed man now," quietly announced the Doctor.

"Jobert Fossert!" almost shrieked the poor girl. "Is that *snake* still living?"

"Yes; but he was about all in when I found him. He was paralyzed and quite helpless, and had given up all hope."

"And did *you* restore the snake, Dr. Nobody?" and a look of sore disappointment o'erspread her wasted but beautiful face.

"Yes, I did my duty in that respect; but before I would take his case I forced him to make complete restitution to you for your property he euchred you out of;" and Doc passed a self-satisfied smile over to Bevna, and fished Fossert's check out of his pocket and passed it over to the trembling and almost hysterical girl.

"Oh, Dr. Nobody! Is it possible? Is there no limit to your strange and uncanny powers of doing good?" and as she read the figures, \$9,176, and a dim realization of what it meant to her dawned on her agitated mind, she broke down and burst into tears and sobbed hysterically.

"There, there; calm yourself, my girl, for I can see a very bright and rosy path ahead of you, and I know you'll enjoy every step on its upward march;" and Doc went over and took her hands in his and soon had her quieted and laffing like a school-kid at its first circus. "But really, Miss Slade, Fossert is a different man and sincerely regrets the

great wrong he did you. He even told me he was glad of an opportunity to pay you in full for what he stole from you. His conscience has been sticking pins in him ever since, and I am certain his state of mind was a potent factor in causing his paralysis; however, he can now walk, and in a few months will be entirely well again. He has learned his lesson and has paid the orchestra—*union* wages.”

“Oh, I’m so glad I can now pay you for your services and goodness to me! Just keep the whole check, Doctor—I won’t need it, now that I can see to teach again;” and she extended the piece of paper to him.

Doc just laffed and said: “Why, child, *you* don’t owe me a penny—the joy I have got out of helping you has been ample remuneration. Now I want you to relax and eat very little for supper to-night, and about 8 o’clock I’ll come in and give your your final treatment—for now you’ll be all right and soon singing and laffing along on that rosy path that leads *uphill* all the way.”

Just then Doc heard the supper bell singing grand opera, and he knew that Sing Woo would have a dandy and dainty little supper ready for him and—*Nexel*. Ah! the music of that name, the melody of her touch, the harmony of her caresses! She was waiting near the door, and her face was radiant with a new glory when she heard the music of his footsteps. She could detect his footsteps among a million. She just kept on smiling and silently held out a pretty white hand toward him. He seized it and pressed it to his lips reverently, and together they entered the dining-room and took their seats over by the big southeast window overlooking the river.

“Oh, Nefton dear! I was so scared when I first heard of the riot and fight—but now—oh, I am so proud of you! You are surely a *super-man*,” exclaimed Nexel.

“Oh, no, Nexel; I’m just a nomadic *quack* doctor,” responded Doc; and they both laffed a duet.

After supper Doc had Nildred bring Bevena into the parlor, and for an hour and a half the three of them pulled off one of their rare musical treats. Then he gave Bevena her treatment and sent her back to her room. Then came Nexel’s last treatment.

“This is the last special treatment, dear Nexel, and to-morrow at exactly 12 o’clock your dear eyes will regain their sight, and then the great beautiful old world will come back to you again in all its wondrous beauty and color,” he told her.

“But, oh, Nefton! just to see your dear face and look into your dear

eyes will be the *whole* world—to me;” and she drooped into his arms and their lips met in a kiss—that needs no eyes.

After an hour spent with Nexel, Doc kissed her good night and started for his room. Driftwood intercepted him and handed him a note. It bore this simple message:

“The boys will secretly guard the hotel to-night. Pleasant dreams,
Chief. BOB.”

“Bless their dear faithful hearts—they’re the real stuff!” and Doc was off to his dreams—and sky-painting.

And oh, what iridescent dreams Nexel enjoyed that night—the last night of her bondage! To-morrow would bring back the flowers and all the world of color—of shade and light—the dear old drifting clouds that melt and change into so many fantastic forms. “But, oh, to see *Nefton*, and mama and sister, and all my dear friends, and the dear little birds that have been such faithful companions thruout my long, long night!”

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT EVENT—A FITTING FINALE.

The next morning was Sunday, and Dr. Nobody took his fill of sleep. When he entered the dining-room it was just 9 o’clock. Nexel was astir at 7, and had done little else all night than to dream and air-castle the future. Sleep only came in fitful spurts and broken dreams, and when she awoke and began to dress she was very nervous and excited. She went quietly out and roamed about the lawn and thru the big garden, and then down to her favorite little bower near the river—where its soft and soothing music caressed and quieted her restive spirit. Here is this leafy bower of tangled vines and fragrant flowers she usually received her little bird friends and the frisky squirrels. They all knew her and loved her haunts, and always came and played and sang with her. They would light on her hands and shoulders and head, and never tired of playing with her; and some of them would follow her clear to the porch when she returned to the house. They all loved her and seemed to understand that she lived in darkness. She felt that *Nefton* would not be down till late. Another faculty she had was being aware of the time—and she couldn’t be fooled to the extent of one minute even. She entered the big hall just as *Nefton* came down the wide and winding stairs, and they went in the dining-room together and enjoyed a dainty and delicate little breakfast that Sing Woo had prepared especially for them. It consisted of strawberries and cream, figs, juvia nuts, fresh catfish, fried mush, creamed new potatoes, coffee with real whipped cream, and fresh butter just out of the

churn and that was free from salt. They sure did enjoy it, and Doc sent some real cigars back to Woo by Smiles. Then, after an hour of reading and smoking on the big veranda, Doc and Nexel took a guitar and banjo and went down to Nexel's little river nest to play and dream—till the momentous hour of *twelve*. Nexel wanted it that way—desired to be alone with her lover when her sight came back to her eyes.

"Oh, Nefton!" she cried; "the joy—the exquisite glory of just seeing your dear face when my lights snap on again! I don't want to see anything else for a *long, long* time—just your sweet face, and feel the protection of your dear arms about me."

"Oh, you romantic little flower! How very melodramatic! But it shall be just as my little precious wishes, for it is *her* resurrection and *our* ascension into *Heaven*—the *Valhalla* and *Arcadia* of mated souls. We'll arrange our positions so we'll be facing one another at 12 o'clock, and we'll play '*Just A Song at Twilight*.' "

"Yes, Nefton; that is soft and dreamy, and you can lead with your banjo and I'll softly trill in an alto with my guitar; and all my little bird friends will be on hand to help on the chorus. Oh! but won't that be sweet, weird, and romantic?"

"Some dreamer and romancer all right!" laughed Doc.

Then he gathered her to his heart and their ripe and ready lips got tangled up some way, and this wild and woolly old world, with all its fragrance and color, its music and flowers, just simply faded out and was no more. Time had even gone out of business. How much longer the sweet soul-chaos would have lasted no one knows; for just then a *red*-bird lighted on Nexel's head and a long brown wood-thrush located on Nefton's tawny hair and began to sing "Annie Laurie." This was so appropriate and amusing that they came out of their trance and began to softly play and sing that old immortal Scotch love-song with the birds.

"Oh, dear!" cried Nexel; "it just lacks *two* minutes of twelve, and I feel like a million eternal suns were all trying to rise over my mental horizon at once."

"Right you are, sweetheart;" and Nefton glanced at his watch and then gazed steadily in her eyes until—

"Oh, Nefton! I can SEE! Yes, yes, I can see YOU, sweetheart!" and she just collapsed into his arms and trembled like an aspen leaf with buck-ague.

He just squeezed her to his heart and planted another kiss on her full, ripe lips, and waited—the coming of the *Dawn*. She just lay limp and lifeless in his arms and trembled and softly moaned for about two

minutes, and then she threw her arms around her lover's neck, and if ever a man reaped a harvest of *soul-kisses*—those *Vast-Forever Soul-Kisses* that have planted the deathless seeds of IMMORTALITY in every life, Nefton was that man.

“Oh, look, dear! Isn't the river beautiful? It's actually yodeling for me! And oh, Nefton, what a BIG boy you are! But I love you and—*I am yours.*”

“And, little sweetheart dear, I am wholly yours, and it is my wish that we be married at once—even *to-day*, if we can find a minister?”

“Oh, Nefton! you impatient BIG BOY! Can't you wait till tomorrow?” and she gave him another kiss that made waiting *hard* work.

“Perhaps, dear, if I have you right in sight every minute of the time, and we can get up *early* in the morning and have it all over with—*before* breakfast.”

“Why, Dr. NOBODY! You've surely astonished the natives enuff already without adding such a stunt as that to your record. And now, dear, I must go to the house and see how mama and sister and all the rest of them look; and you know I've never seen Smiles and Sing Woo and Driftwood. Oh! but won't life be a dream full of colors and music now? And to think that I shall have *you* besides! Oh, Nefton! I'm afraid my great happiness will *kill* me;” and she stepped up on a fallen log and helped him unload another kiss—that put *to-morrow* far off in the distance.

The girl's happiness was only second to her mother's and sister's, and the sensational and apparently miraculous event soon spread all over the town and to other towns. The wonderful news soon reached Frisco and the Doctor soon had a delegation of learned oculists and physicians out to Bendville to see him and to learn his secret.

It would be such a futile waste of time and paper to attempt to describe how happy were Mrs. Melvin and Mestel, and all her friends and acquaintances. Words are such helpless and inadequate things at times—and this was one of the times. However, Mrs. Melvin would not hear of the marriage taking place before the next Sunday—just a week hence.

“Surely, Nexel, a week is a very short time to prepare a girl for her wedding,” the mother said. “We ought to have a month, at least, but, considering what Dr. Nobody has done for us, we will have to consider his wishes in the matter; but a week we must have, dauter; so you inform the restless young knight that he will have to curb his impatience a little.” That was mater's ultimatum, and Doc had to agree to it; but he

sure did feel like fighting the League of Nations and singing a solo to the *Rocky Mountains*.

The news soon spread all over town about Nexel's miraculous recovery from the Great Darkness that had euchred her out of six years of her youth, and the Inn sure had a crowded dining-room that evening—and even the next morning hundreds of the oldest citizens came in to eat their breakfast—in order to see Nexel and congratulate her. After 168 of the townspeople had been served breakfast Monday morning, Sing Woo tossed his big white chef's cap in the atmosphere and sent the following message by Driftwood: "Chloloflom the flools, Dloctor!" And all day Monday and most of Tuesday there was a steady stream of townspeople calling at the hotel to congratulate Nexel and her mother. Nexel's father, Judge Vestour, was one of the town's pioneer citizens, and had always stood ace-high in the community; and Nexel was such an incomparably lovely character that everybody loved her. Every wing for miles around knew her and sang pæans of praise at sight of the girl; and she loved them all and called them her "*angel children*." It was an everyday sight to see the beautiful and patient blind girl wandering about the big shady lawns singing to her own accompaniment on the guitar or banjo, and a dozen or more birds sitting on her great masses of dusk-tangled hair and on her shoulders and fluttering about her and all singing with her. It was an *unwritten* poem and greatly interested strangers. Many a young man lingered at the Inn long after his business had been finished in the town—just to watch and secretly admire the strange girl and her little winged friends; but never a one breathed a word of the unspoken love that glowed in his heart and planted flowers in his soul. To them all she was a *super-girl*, an uncanny creature from some other world—to teach us gentleness, patience, and humility, and to live true to our ideals.

After a late dinner that Sunday, the Doctor and his little *fiancee* went for a dream on the river and did not return until the soft and soothing moonlight lit the way for their tiny barque. They had fully matured all their plans for the wedding on the following Sunday, and they both decided that an ordinary wedding would not do at all. Something unique and *different* from all other weddings would be required for the union of such extraordinary people. They would be married just at *sun-up*, when the whole place would be bathed in all the rich and mystic glory of a sunrise on the Sacramento River in the soft and tawny haze of a perfect autumn morning in mid-October—a time when Nature is using all the colors on her palette—a season when even the *immortal Rubens* would feel like a rookie on a rainbow. Every wing would vibrate with life and

help reflect the sun's myriad rays, and every throat would be caroling the *great God of Day* as he slowly rose o'er the hazy horizon. Surely an ideal time and place for celebrating a *love-feast*. They would meet in the Inn, and each be dressed in gala attire—she in white trimmed in red, and he dressed in soft gray trimmed in a soft and whispering shade of red. With their guitar and banjo they would slowly walk down to Nexel's little leafy bower near the river, and softly sing and yodel as they walked along. When they reached the bower, Nefton would take her in his arms, and while they thus stood facing the beautiful river, an orchestra of seven pieces, hidden in the shrubbery and behind the vines and trees, would softly play "Here Comes the Minister." At the conclusion of the wedding march, the minister, who is entirely invisible to the combatants, begins slowly to read the marriage service, while the culprits stand facing the river and clasped in each other's arms—instead of merely playing hands, as in the old way.

"Dr. Nobody, do you want to keep this little girl you now hold in your arms, for all time?"

"I'll say so—and then some!" replied Doc.

"Miss Vestour, are you willing to stick to the man in whose arms you are now resting, till the cows come home and the sheep wander away again?"

"You know it—and if he ever looks at another skirt, I'll eat him alive!"

Here a few Vast-forever Soul-kisses are inserted.

"Then, in accordance to Man's statutes and Nature's *eternal and unchangeable laws*, I pronounce you *one* and *equals*, and neither one is to be *boss!*"

Some more Soul-kisses, and then the minister and their relatives and guests all part the bushes and come forth and congratulate them and wish them happiness.

Doc's fast and nifty little launch is already just below them, and it is a bower of flowers and gaily festooned bunting, with the American flag flying from the bow and singing "The Star-spangled Banner" for them. As the boat starts off up the river their friends throw flowers, instead of rice, over them. They will be off at about 6:30, and after a short trip up the river they will get back at about ten, and will find a dainty and delicious little wedding breakfast ready for them, and it will be served at Nexel's little dream bower down by the river. After the breakfast they will start on a month's honeymoon trip down the river to Frisco and return. They will live like gypsies or Bohemians on their boat and do

their own cooking. They can have fish right out of the river into the frying-pan, and will gather wild fruits and nuts along the way; and oh, what a dream-time!

As their boat starts off down the river the orchestra softly plays "Nancy Lee" and "A Life on the Ocean Wave," and Nefton and Nexel join in and play it with the orchestra until they cannot see nor hear the "ork" any longer. They tried to slip into Frisco and attend the theaters without the reporters getting onto them, but it was no use—the whole romantic affair was too good copy to bury on a rear page; so they bloomed all over the front pages and were pestered to death by all sorts of people wanting to meet them and sick-folks wanting Doc to cure them. They soon gave Frisco up as impossible, and took to their little launch and drifted back up the river to *home*.

Doc bought about 400 acres of land up the river a short distance, and together they builded themselves an artistic and ideal little home-nest—where Nexel could daily meet her little bird friends; an *Arcadia* where only happiness could enter. The sick and crippled came to Doc from all over the country and he devoted six hours every day to them.

The crooks that had planned to arrest Doc on a trumped-up charge, so as to murder him by a hypodermic injection of cyanide of potassium, all left Bendville and never returned.

Little Bevena Slade resumed music-teaching and soon had more than she could do. She climbed up rapidly and was very popular and much sought after by the men, but she steadfastly turned them all down and gave her whole time and life to her beloved music. After two years of turning them down, she got mad one day and married *Bob Pelton*—"because he just wouldn't stay turned down," she explained to Doc and Nexel after the event was history.

"Well, Bevena, you got a *real* man when you captured my friend Bob; but if he doesn't behave and obey you properly, you just send for me!" and Doc slapped Bob on the back and wished them every happiness.

And as pairing off seemed quite epidemic, Driftwood persuaded Smiles to wear his name and help him make a living. Poor old Woo just shrugged his Celestial shoulders and grunted: "White flokes alle samee clazy!" Jobert Fossert recovered entirely and became one of Doc's best friends and supporters. At the next election the people of Bendville wanted to elect Doc as their mayor, but he declined and nominated *Mr. Robert Pelton*, and any nag that Doc backed in those days got the blue ribbon.

THE END.

JOE'S BABY.

CHAPTER I.

Joseph Bentley Nilewood was raised on a farm near Fort Wayne, Indiana, but had little inclination for farm life. Joe had considerable wanderlust in his blood and was something of a poet and a dreamer. He remained on his father's farm till he was twelve years of age and his father died; then he went to live with his Uncle Henry Nilewood on a farm in an adjoining county. Uncle Henry was a good enuff man as men were then measured in the rural districts, but he was of the pious and devout variety, and believed that plenty of hard work was the only salvation for a boy—or girl, either. Uncle Henry was also deficient in a sense of humor and frowned on most of life's pastimes and amusements. He didn't believe in dancing and other amusements of the youngsters, and a deck of cards was a device of Satan for leading souls to perdition. One Sunday afternoon late in April he caught his nephew and three of the naboring boys up in the barn-loft with a deck of cards between them. This was evidence enuff of their lost condition. Uncle Henry promptly confiscated the cards and then and there proceeded to teach Joe a lesson "the young rascal would never forget." As Uncle Henry was a big and husky man of only thirty-eight, he easily administered a sound thrashing to Joe and promised to report the other lads to their parents. This harsh and brutal treatment added to a cold and desolate life was the last brick that caused the whole structure to crumble and fall. When Joe was taken over to Uncle Henry's shortly after the demise of his father, the lad was told that if he stuck and worked hard and lived in the fear of the Lord till he was twenty-one, from that time on he would be paid the munificent sum of \$12 a month and his keep.

Every lash of the cruel halter-strap over Joe's back and arms only increased the wanderlust in the lad's blood, and that very night he planned to leave Uncle Henry's—without bidding that kind and gentle old man adieu. As the boy had nothing in the way of luggage except a cheap suit of homespun clothes and his work clothes, it didn't take him long to make his get-away. About midnight, after he had satisfied himself that his sweet and gentle uncle was sleeping peacefully, Joe hastily donned his only suit and Sunday boots, and with his mother's picture in his coat pocket and \$1.32 in money, he noiselessly slipped out and drifted away toward town. About 3 o'clock that morning he was lucky enuff to

catch a freight that was just pulling out of the yards on the Big Four for St. Louis. The train rambled along all that night, and about ten the next night it snorted into East Saint Louis and stopped. The train crew soon left it, and it wasn't long until Joe decided the blamed old thing was stalled or something else was wrong with it. He did not know that a train ever had a destination and went no further; however, Joe was acquiring information of all kinds, and very rapidly at that. After deciding the train was going no further, he crawled out of the lumber-car and began stretching his legs and getting some fresh air in his lungs. He also realized that his stomach was trying to send him a wireless. He had not tasted of food since his dinner on the preceding Sunday, and of course he had an appetite. He was still sore and his lash-wounds were smarting and hurting like blazes, and the twenty-hour bumping on that freight didn't soothe his wounds or feelings in the least. Joe felt like taking a fall out of the whole world.

He had hardly gotten well out of that car, and was wondering where to go and how to find the way, when a railroad bull (a detective) approached him and bawled out: "Hey there, Bo! Where'n hell did yuh come from?"

"My name's not Bo, and I just dropped down from Heaven;" and the boy gave him a look that was a good-bye and a challenge. Then he started away toward the river, but not realizing where he was nor where he was going.

"Hold on there! you little devil, you'll have to come along with me," cried the bull, and he made a grab for the boy; but Joe was too quick for him and ducked down and grabbed up a big 6-pound lump of coal and let it go with all his might at the bull's head, and it caught him full over his left ear and face. The bull went down and out, but Joe didn't stay to see how long he would remain *hors du combat*; in fact, it wasn't a bit of Joe's business to give "first aid" to battered bulls; besides, the boy considered that the bull deserved all he got.

After wandering around in the network of rails and ties in the freight yards, the boy finally saw a street-car go whizzing by. He soon found the tracks, and when the next car arrived he climbed aboard and was soon over in St. Louis. He drifted into a cheap cafe down near the water-front and spent fifteen cents for something to eat. Then he wandered along the water-front till daylight, when he came upon a big steamboat that had just docked and was discharging its passengers and cargo. As this was Joe's first boat, it was a wonder-thing to the lad. How easily and gracefully the giant thing glided thru the water! "And

don't seem to have any fear of drowning," mused Joe to himself. And it was wonderful the way the deck-hands unloaded it. It seemed to the boy they would never get the packages and boxes and barrels all out and on the shore. "By gum! it must hold more than a freight train," exclaimed the lad in wonderment. After awhile people began to come with their bags and luggage and go aboard the great thing. Joe decided he wanted to ride on the big boat, so he strolled on deck as the others were doing. No one was there to stop him or to ask any questions. The boat had left St. Louis about an hour and was proceeding down the great river, when the Captain found the boy and asked for his ticket.

"I haven't any such a thing," meekly admitted the lad, and he hung his head and fidgeted with his hands.

"Well, my boy, every one who rides on this boat must have a ticket;" and the Captain laid his hand gently on the lad's shoulder and looked him over critically. "Where do you want to go, son?" kindly continued the official.

"Any place where the boat goes, I reckon," timidly admitted Joe.

"Aren't you running away from home?" asked the Captain.

"Not exactly, for I have no home since my parents died. I went to live with my Uncle Henry, but he beat me awfully because me and some other boys played cards one Sunday. He nearly starved me to death, and wanted me to do nothing but work and work and be solum and go to church and read the Bible all the time; so I lit out and want to make my own way in the world;" and Joe looked the Captain square in the eyes and never flinched.

"That's the way to talk, my boy; be a real little man and make your own way in the world, and don't let anyone run over you;" and the man again patted the boy on the shoulder.

"How much money have you, Joe?" and the Captain winked to himself as he asked the question.

"About a dollar, I reckon;" and Joe looked anything but prosperous.

"I thot so. Well, Joseph, how would you like to stay on the boat and help me—do errands, and such like?"

"That would be fine, and I'll do my best if you will give me a chance."

"All right, my boy; you are in my employ, and you must be honest, respectful, and truthful, and do whatever I tell you to do. I'll pay you twenty dollars a month and give you all the good grub you can eat, and you'll bunk on the boat of course."

Joe was nearly fifteen when he got his job on the *Jolly Rover*, as the boat was named. He remained with his good friend, Captain Morris, for three years. He soon won the confidence and respect of all he met. He studied hard and soon acquired an education, and had saved up his money and now had good clothes and about \$700 in cash. He had been running from St. Louis to New Orleans, and had learned telegraphy—and many other useful things. He was always loyal and faithful to the Captain and a great help to that official. The Captain was a widower and had lost his only son; so Joe walked right into his big heart from the start. The Captain had received injuries in an accident that resulted in his death a few weeks afterward. Joe remained with him and nursed him to the last. He left Joe his fine gold watch and diamond shirt-stud and \$3,000 in cash.

Joe was again out on the great sea of Life and had no definite plans in view. He had heard so many tales about the great Southwest, he decided to see it; so he started for El Paso. After knocking around that quaint old town for about two weeks, he decided to stick and began looking for a job. At the boarding-house where Joe lived in El Paso he met a number of railroad men, and one day he told them he was a telegrapher and wanted work.

"Why, our Superintendent is in need of several men, and I happen to know that he wants a man for the station out at Pecos," said one of the men. The agent out there recently eloped with the company's money—both the express and railroad, and as it is such a lonely little hole, it is hard to get a good man to go out there and stick."

"Where is Pecos?" inquired Joe doubtfully.

"It's about seventy-five miles southeast of here and on the main line of the T. & P.; and the Santa Fe comes in there from the north, and the Pecos Valley Southern has a branch running south from there. It's a desert of a place, but the work is light and one has plenty of time to read and dream—if one is inclined that way. It also has plenty of Mexicans, Indians, prairie dogs, sand, rattlesnakes, and tarantulas, but the climate is cool and salubrious—seldom getting above 130 in the summer time; but then the summers are short—only lasting from February 13th to December 29th. The rest of the year the temperature is moderate—about 99 to 110. It is on the beautiful Pecos River and back about seventy-five miles from the Rio Grande." The other railroad men all joined in the laff at their comrade's vivid (and more or less truthful) description of the Pecos Valley and the town of Pecos.

"Some town!" was Joe's quiet comment. "However, I'll drop around in the morning and have a talk with the Superintendent."

It didn't take the Superintendent long to convince Joe that Pecos was a peach of a place and a good place to live. "Have you a family, Mr. Nilewood?" he asked, after looking Joe over carefully.

"No, sir; I'm all alone in the world. I never found but one girl I wanted, and she wanted the other fellow;" and Joe smiled grimly.

"Too bad, my boy; but life is full of ruff places and we have many bumps coming to us before we get thru. I was in hopes you was a married man, for they are more likely to stick than a single man; however, they have some mighty pretty girls out at Pecos, and you may succumb to their wiles and get married."

"Possibly," admitted Joe. "One never knows just what he may bump into."

"Then you are willing to take the job?" inquired the Superintendent. "We pay sixty-five dollars a month to start with, and if you prove the right man and we can trust you, the salray will be raised to eighty-five a month."

"Well, if you will furnish me transportation out there, I'll go out and look the place over and see what I can find in the way of a place to board and so forth."

"Sure—here you are, and you can go out on No. 4 tonight, which leaves at 6:20. If you decide to stick, just wire me and we'll put you right to work. The boob we have there now is wanting to quit and we have a hard time to keep him there till we can send a man to relieve him. Good day, Mr. Nilewood, and success to you."

"*Weunos stardes, senor,*"

"Oh! do you speak Spanish? That will be a great asset to you out there."

CHAPTER II.

JOE'S NEW JOB.

About 9:40 that night Joe arrived in Pecos on No. 4, and put up for the night at the only hotel the place afforded—a dirty and dinky little two-story frame dwelling-house that had been converted into a hotel. It was run by a renegade American and his half-breed wife. The bedbugs introduced themselves and would not stand for any discourtesy or lack of respect on the part of the guests. Joe never remembered whether it was nine or eleven dogs they harbored, and that slept in the house and in the beds that were not occupied by human guests or so many bedbugs the dogs

could not sleep soundly. Anyway, one night there was all that Joe could stand. He got his breakfast at a cafe where they serve chili-concarne, pie and prairie dog tracks for breakfast; and as he did not try their other meals, I am unable to tell my readers what they fed their guests at the other meals. After breakfast Joe started in to give the place a careful once-over and see if he could find a suitable room and place to board. If he could find anything in the eating line or in the way of a room that suited him, he felt sure he could stand the climate and the citizens. As for society and amusement, he realized that his duties at the *stopo* (new word for *depot*) would take up most of his time, and the balance he intended to employ in reading and increasing his education and improving his mind; so he had no fears on those scores; but Joe did like a comfortable room and a good clean place to eat.

There were few rooms to be had, and they were rather primitive and anything but clean; however, after looking the town over, a young doctor told him of Mrs. Zemba Turner's boarding-house up on the hill. Joe soon climbed up there, and estimated it to be a full half-mile from the stopo. "But I'll need some daily exercise," he said, "and in this way I'll be sure to get it; besides, there is a beautiful view from here, and I can see the pretty little Pecos River winding and dreaming along toward the Rio Grande like a *silver dream ribbon*. Yes, I like it up here, and it kind o' seems homelike already." He soon applied the old-fashioned nocker to the door, and a real *petite* and pretty little Mexican girl answered his summons with a smile and a merry "*Buenos dias, senor*," and she opened the door and invited him to come in and she would announce his presence to "*la Senora*." Senora Turner soon appeared and made a pleasant obeisance and politely asked Joe what was on his mind.

"I am looking for a place to room and board, and Dr. Benton recommended your place to me," returned Joe in his easy and indolent manner, which he acquired in the Southland.

"What is your business or occupation?" tentatively inquired the winsome Senora Turner, who was just turned of thirty, but looked much younger.

"I'm the new stopo agent, and will take charge down there today if I can find suitable quarters to live in this town," Joe replied.

This seemed satisfactory to the madam, and she informed Joe that her big southeast room had just been vacated that morning, and she thot they could manage to feed him. Joe looked at the room and said it would do, and soon the terms were agreed on and all arrangements made.

"Very well, Mrs. Turner; I'll go back to the stopo and wire the

Superintendent in El Paso that I will take hold and make things hum and have the boys send my trunk and suit-case down on No. 2 in the morning. And here is the money for the first week;" and Joe handed her seven dollars.

Then Joe returned to the stopo and sent the following wire to the Superintendent: "Will stick and make things sizzle. JOE B. NILEWOOD."

When the Superintendent read it, he remarked to the Roadmaster, who happened to be in his office: "That fellow's the right stuff, and I feel that our troubles out at Pecos are past."

"It does have the right ring," said the Roadmaster, "and I hope he will stick and keep things moving out there. How old is he?"

"Twenty-five, he told me, and he is a pleasant and clean-cut young man that is well set up and has a clear and honest eye and a hand-shake that indicates reserve power and executive ability of a high character;" and the Superintendent looked relieved and well pleas'd. He wired the other man out there to turn the office over to Joe and then come in on No. 5 that night and report in the morning.

At 11:45 that day Joe took charge of the office and became the company's sole representative at Pecos; and Joseph did make things sizzle, too, as he promised to do. The railroad's business gradually increased and Joe soon wrote to friends of his in New Orleans and elsewhere and told them of the wonderful opportunities in that land of eternal sunshine and cactus-back fleas. Inside of a year Joe had induced forty-eight people to come there and locate, and they all succeeded, and they in turn caused others to come. One of the first things that Joe did was to buy up, with the \$3,000 the old Captain had left him, 160 acres of fine land near Pecos and six town lots near the stopo, which Joe figured out would make an ideal site for a mill and elevator. The town at that time had no such things. He got the 160 acres for \$5 an acre, and the six lots near the stopo for \$10 each; and then he found eight vacant lots in the outskirts for sale, and soon bought them for \$10 apiece. This only knocked a little old dinky hole in his \$3,000 to the extent of \$940. He had most of the \$700 he had saved up, and now had a good job and a place to live and board that appealed strongly to his nature. He liked the landlady and felt sure she liked him; and the little Mexican senorita was about as chipper and pretty as they make them, and Joe felt sure she would be a friend, and admitted to himself that he liked her.

Joe knew of a friend in St. Louis who was a first-class carpenter, but could not let booze alone long enuff to get anything ahead. He was

always hard up and broke most of the time. He owed Joe \$75 that Joe loaned him when he was sick and had to go to the hospital. Joe wrote him and asked if he wanted to come out there, where there was plenty of room and pure air and more opportunity than in the crowded cities. He replied that he wanted to do that very thing, but didn't have enuff to pay his fare so far. Joe sent him transportation and in about a week he blew into Pecos and greeted Joe with: "Hello, old top! This is a hell of a country you have out here."

"I'm feeling fine, Jasper; and after you get some of that St. Louis smoke out of your lungs and get acclimated, you'll like it out here; anyway, you can do much better out here than in the cities. If you will brace up; I'll grub-stake you and help you get on the right side of the ledger;" and Joe grasped his hand in true Western style.

"All right, Joe; it's me for the straight and dry lane from now on. What yer got up yer sleeve?" was Jasper's hearty response.

"Did you bring your tools with you?" inquired Joe.

"Yep; I left nothin' behind but a few debts and a lovely reputation." They both laffed at this bit of wit, for Joe well knew what a "lovely" reputation Jasper left behind in the Mound City.

"Well," replied Joe, "I've just taken a flyer in some vacant lots, and the town is greatly in need of small houses of about five rooms; in fact, it is in need of most everything a town needs to make it grow and amount to anything. I intend to build neat little five-room houses on my lots and rent them to friends of mine who will come out here and locate as soon as they can get a decent house to live in. Now I thot you would be glad of a chance to get away from the city, where you could never be anybody or anything, and get away out here and start life all over again. You are about my age and a good mechanic, and I want to employ you at your trade building my houses, and there will be plenty more work in your line, for I intend to put this dead little burg on the map and make it hum."

"Bully for you, Joe! You always was a sort of a leader and gifted with prophecy. Your plan just suits me clean down to the ground, for I realize it will be my salvation, and then it will give me a chance to repay what I owe you. Shake again, old man. I'm right with you, and I am going to shake my old master—Mr. Booze!"

"Good!" exclaimed Joe with fervor; "now I know I can make a *man* out of you and help you up the heights."

"Where do we eat in this blisterin' place?" and Jasper took in his belt another notch and wiped the sweat with the other hand at the same time.

"Why—er—I have a dandy place up at a private boarding-house on top of the hill away off yonder, and it gives one an appetite to climb up there;" and Joe smiled pleasantly at his old friend.

"Well, I don't think I need anything to increase my appetite—just the opposite is what I need. I feel so empty I could eat the sow and pigs and follow the boar a mile." They both laughed at this sally of wit.

"In about twenty minutes I'll have things cleaned up and I'll take you up with me and see if Mrs. Turner and Julene can fill you up. Mrs. Turner is my landlady; and Julene is the little Mexican girl of all work—and she's a beaut, too; but you've got to be mighty careful of your conduct up there, for the madam is inclined to be a sky-brow," said Joe.

"I'll have to get a shave and clean up a little before I can face a place like that;" and Jasper swelled up like war profits and struck an attitude.

"I have a razor in my room and I'll try and make you presentable," said Joe.

"They soon reached Mrs. Turner's home, and by good luck no one saw Jasper slip in with Joe; so when he was introduced by Joe as a friend, he readily passed muster, and as he was really a good-looking and pleasant young man, he made a good impression. Mrs. Turner had fifteen men boarders and ten young women—most of whom were good-looking. Joe had coached Jasper about his language and manners, so he got by very nicely. Among the men boarders was Mr. Winton, the owner of the largest store in Pecos, and he had many repairs he needed in his store, and he wanted to build on an extension to his store and put up two stories on top of it and make them into office rooms, etc.; and he desired to build a warehouse; so, when he found that Jasper was a carpenter, he immediately got interested in him and engaged him to do the work for him while Joe was getting his materials ready for his house-building. Jasper found a room at Mrs. Turner's and made arrangements to eat there. Joe gave him \$50, so he could get some proper clothes and to pay his board and look prosperous, etc. He didn't want any of them to know that his friend Jasper was down and out. Yes, Joe was some manager. The next day Jasper went to work for Mr. Winton, and in less than a week he had enuff work in sight to keep him employed for a year. Jasper got some new clothes and a hair-cut, and soon looked like a new mortal. Life looked altogether different to him now. No more booze and dissipation for Jasper. He was now inspired to live the higher life and stand in with the people worth knowing.

CHAPTER III.
PECOS HAS A BOOM.

Under Joe's skillful management real live people from the East began to pour into Pecos and embark in business. Among these was Mr. Grant Holden and his wife and daughter, Elzie. Mr. Holden had quite a bit of money, and his wife had recently inherited \$60,000 from her father's estate. They saw that the town needed a hotel about as much as a town can need such an enterprise, so they got busy and put up a first-class little hotel of sixty rooms and furnished it nicely, and then conducted it as a hotel ought to be conducted. It was a big success from the start. Mr. Holden was the means of bringing two more carpenters and a brick-layer and a stone-mason to the burg, and these were kept on the jump from the time they landed. Joe soon found a man who was looking for a mill-site and a good place for an elevator. Joe bought up five acres of land on the river-front where a mill would want to locate. This only cost him \$40. The mill-man soon blew in and at once picked his site for the mill. Joe sold him the five acres for an even \$1,000, and one of his houses and lots that Jasper had just finished, for \$1,800. Joe had customers for all his houses, and now he invested in ten more lots and continued to build neat little five-room cottages. After Joe had been there about three months, he and Jasper went out and roamed all over the valley, and on their rambles they found a real beauty-spot just two miles up the river. At that point the river spread out and was quite wide and much deeper than usual, and the river at this point circled around like a letter U and almost made an island out of that neck of land. The land inside of this "U" was about sixty-eight acres and full of beautiful trees. Joe at once saw that Nature intended this beauty-spot for a park and playground for the people. He said nothing to Jasper while they fished there and soon caught a big string of catfish and pike. Joe soon found the owner was a man who lived in San Antonio, Texas. He got a week's lay-off and transportation to the Texas town and return. When he returned he had a deed to that land, and immediately set about converting it into a park and pleasure resort. It was a success from the start, and after three years Joe sold it to the town for \$30,000. The railroad and express business were increasing so fast the Superintendent in El Paso came down on No. 2 one Tuesday morning to investigate. He soon found it was all due to their enterprising agent. They had raised his salary to \$80 a month after he had held the post six months; now they raised him to \$150.

The company was delighted with Joe, and soon laid their plans to elect him mayor; but only on condition that he would stay with them as

their agent. The next spring Joe was almost unanimously elected the mayor of Pecos, but took it all modestly and buckled in and worked harder than ever. Joe was popular with all he met, and up at Mrs. Turner's he was I T T. The landlady herself had cast many an admiring eye at Joe, but he did not seem a bit interested in calico. Almost every girl and old maid in town went angling for Joseph, but Joe was a shy fish and refused to bite at any calico bait. Julene was very much interested in him, but she soon found it would only be a waste of time to cast a line in his direction; so she turned her attention to Jasper, and Jasper seemed only too willing to play the calico game with the pretty little Julene Dantos. Julene's father was French and her mother half Spanish and half Indian. She was a real bright and clever little girl and chuck-full of love and romance. She was also quite musical and played and sang well on the guitar and piano. Jasper was crazy about her, and he was also making good in every way and was out of debt and had about \$1,500 saved up for the event.

The town had gained more than a thousand inhabitants since Joe located there. Joe was reticent about his past, and some of the gossips even hinted that he had a wife back east somewhere, and that was why he refused to be captured by the fair sex. Joe simply would not discuss his past with anyone, but had told Mrs. Turner at the beginning that he was single. Joe continued his public-spirited enterprises and the town continued to fill up with strangers. Everything he touched was a success and he was rapidly becoming wealthy; but this and his political honors did not spoil him in the least. He took hold as mayor early in April, and the latter part of May an event happened that almost bumped him off the map and that altered his whole life. This event was so strange and fascinating that it was the cause of this story being written.

CHAPTER IV.

WOONA NILEWOOD.

May 27th dawned bright and clear with not a cloud in the sky—in fact, a perfect day. Joe had arrived at the stopo a little before 8 o'clock, as was his custom, as he had to be there and ready for business at 8 a. m. He was feeling very fine and happy and whistling "On the Banks of the Wabash," a quaint old Indiana love-song that in some way often played hookey in Joe's big heart. It may have been partly due to the fact that Joe was a native son of Indiana, and then it might have been partly due to another affair in Natchez, Mississippi. As Joe stated to the Superintendent, he had never found but one girl he wanted, and she wanted the other fellow. This girl was also a native of Indiana, and Joe met her

on the boat when he was with Captain Morris. She was on her way to Natchez to visit her mother's relatives. She got a half-Nelson on Joe's heart, but he couldn't even get a promise to write out of her. This little incident settled the calico game for Joe.

On this particular morning Joe had only been at the key a few minutes to call the dispatcher and Superintendent to report on duty when he felt something soft and clinging trying to climb up his left leg, and cooing softly and making a sound that sounded like "W-o-o-n-a." His first impulse was to think it was a cat purring against his leg, as cats are wont to do. He quickly looked down, and his eyes encountered a pair of the most wonderfully beautiful eyes any human ever saw, and they continued to look into his as the owner of the eyes kept up the cooing sound of "W-o-o-n-a" and tried to climb up his leg. It was only a little girl, not quite two years old, and the most wondrously beautiful child Joe had ever seen. Joe reached down with a sweet smile and lifted the child up on his lap. She didn't seem in the least afraid of him, and just snuggled up closer to him and hid her face on his breast and continued the strange and weird cooing, "W-o-o-n-a." She looked pale, and Joe soon guessed that the child was hungry. Here was a pretty pickle indeed! "Where in the world did the child come from, and how did she get in there?" And many other similar questions crowded in on his bewildered mind and clamored for an answer.

The little waif just clung to his shirt and seemed perfectly happy—but hungry. Joe had several cans of cream in the baggage-room waiting for No. 5 that night, and it didn't take him long to get some of the rich cream for the little castaway; and the way the poor little thing did eat and cooed and smiled up at her host was enuff to touch any heart. Joe's whole heart just opened up and took the little stranger in at one gulp—and a new and sweet happiness swept over his soul and the skies had new tints and the flowers all had a new and sweeter fragrance; in fact, Joe was happy and contented for the first time in all his life.

Joe now realized what was lacking from his life to complete it and make him happy. He had plenty of wealth now, and had been highly honored by the citizens by being elected mayor, etc., but always realized that *Something* was still lacking; and now he knew what it was. He needed the love of a wife and children to make his life complete and a *real* success; but what in the world would he do with the little waif? How could he account for her up at the boarding-house? Of course the whole town would soon know it, and what a scandal it would cause! Nobody would believe him when he told them that the child just appeared like a

cloud or a dream, and here she was and insisted on remaining. Joe wouldn't have given her up for all the world, and yet what could he, an old bachelor and a very busy man, do with a child—a mere baby yet? These were some questions, I will admit, but as it is Joe's problem, and not mine, I'll just let him attend to it, and I feel quite sure my readers will be profoundly interested in following Joe up to the boarding-house and witnessing the performance, for I assure you it will be a piece of vaudeville well worth seeing.

"If the fools only had good sense and could be reasonable," mused Joe to himself, "it would be all right; but they will only laff at my story and say: 'Humph! he can tell that to the marines—but not to us. This explains *why* he never got interested in the women. The wretch has a wife somewhere back East that he's deserted, or the child is an illegitimate one of his and some poor girl he's ruined, and she has sent it to him before she killed herself, and so on.'" The more Joe thot of it the more he felt like a poor culprit being led to the scaffold by an unemotional sheriff. And the more he tried to explain it the worse he'd make it; but anyway, he'd keep the kid—no matter what happened. If it came to a show-down, he could flee to unknown parts and start all over again and rear the child as *his own*. The little waif seemed to intuitively sense the feelings that surged thru his mind and heart, for she only clung closer to him and cooed over and over again the one word, "*W-o-o-n-a*." And when she caught his eyes, she just smiled and smiled at him and seemed perfectly happy. And every smile and clinging touch of the little hands only carried her further into Joe's heart and soul.

It was now time to close up and start home—to Mrs. Turner's. He resolutely took the child in his strong arms and pressed her to his heart and kissed her smiling face, and the kid just squeezed her pretty white and shapely little arms around his sun-burned neck and cooed, "*W-o-o-n-a*." "Bless its sweet little heart—I wish it was my very own!" said Joe. The child seemed to understand, for she just squeezed all the harder and smiled with a smile that would melt the ice from any heart.

In about twenty-five minutes Joe reached Mrs. Turner's, and, as luck would have it, nearly all the boarders were assembled on the wide veranda and some of them lounging out in the big front yard and enjoying the soft and abundant grass. When he saw what an audience he would have, his heart seemed bent on just sinking thru the earth; however, he stiffened up his backbone and marched up like a conquering hero returning from France. It would be only a waste of words to say that he was the cynosure of all eyes.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Just see what a nice little guest I have;" and then speech seemed to desert him and his legs seemed to have forgotten their function.

"Some guest you have, Mr. Mayor," said Mr. Winston, politely bowing. "Would you mind introducing her *by name*?" and the others all smiled broadly, but said nothing.

"Certainly, Mr. Winston. Meet Miss Woonie Nilewood," and Joe carried the child up to where Mr. Winston was standing, and as he reached her out toward that gentleman the child just smiled at him sweetly, but clung all the closer to Joe.

"Oh, and just to think that our chief executive has a daughter and we didn't know it!" chipped in Miss Venice George, the principal of the schools.

"Just an adopted daughter," corrected Joe, nervously.

"Indeed!" coldly exclaimed Miss Stella Ferguson, a bookkeeper in the only bank the town afforded.

"Yes; I just adopted her today," continued Joe, for lack of something better to say.

"Of course her *mother* is dead?" sarcastically inquired Mrs. Bentley Martin, wife of a wealthy cattleman and mine-owner.

"I'm sure I don't—Oh, yes, to be sure she is," corrected Joe, but he was a little too late.

The ladies all got up and filed into the house, and Mr. Winston went up to Joe and said kindly: "My boy, you've sure got both feet into it."

Then Joe called the men boarders around him and told the story straight; but most of them only smiled good-naturedly and proceeded to roll another cigaret. Mr. Winston and Jasper stood by the Mayor and said they believed every word of it, and Jasper even offered to fight anyone who doubted Joe's story. "Oh! of course we all believe the Mayor's yarn," protested the men present; but their looks belied their words.

Joe waited outside on the lawn till the women boarders had finished and come out again, and then he took his *guest* in his arms and walked bravely in and faced Mrs. Turner. Her face was a study, but mostly inscrutable; however, she was willing to hear his explanation, but as she had already heard it from the other boarders, and their uncharitable comments on it, she was very much inclined, woman like, to doubt his story.

Joe strode boldly into the dining-room with the child clinging to him and cooing contentedly. "Mrs. Turner," he said, "I have a strange guest, this sweet little child that drifted into my office this morning from I know

not where nor how she got there. The first I knew of her presence she was tugging at my trousers and trying to climb my leg. At first I thot it was a cat that had gained access to the office in some way. There was nothing for me to do except take the child up and care for her until her parents could be found. I am of the opinion that the child was put in the office by its parents or by some miscreant who stole it from its home and for some reason or other wished to get rid of it; however, the poor little waif has found the door to my heart and I wouldn't take the world for her. I have decided to act like a civilized human being and adopt the child and give it my name and bring it up decently—and I don't care what the gossips say! Let them babble all they want to—it's no crime to adopt a child, and I already love the little thing, and she seems so happy and contented with me. I assure you on my word of honor as a gentleman that the child is not related to me in any way, and I have no knowledge as to how it came in my office;" and Joe straightened up to his height and gave his landlady a look of defiance that was plainly a challenge.

"Mr. Nilewood," she replied, "it is a most remarkable event and seems to defy all explanation, but as there is no harm done anyone, and as you say you have adopted the little waif, there seems nothing to do but make the best of it; so we will try and help you out of your awkward dilemma."

"Thank you, Mrs. Turner, for your humanity and sensible view of the matter. I'll pay you well for anything you do for the child," said Joe, gratefully.

Just then Julene came in and held out her pretty dark-skinned arms toward the little waif and cooed at her. The child smiled back at Julene and cooed her "*W-o-o-n-a*" as before, and reached out her tiny hands toward the maid, who took her and began to mother the little orphan in true maternal style. "Oh! isn't she just the cutest and sweetest little thing in all the world?" cried Julene. Then she held the baby up toward Mrs. Turner, and the child just cooed and smiled at her and reached out its little baby arms toward the landlady. This was the last straw that touched Mrs. Turner's maternal instincts, and her dignified face at once softened, and she reached out for the child and took it and pressed it to her heart and rubbed her face against its face, and the way the little baby put its arms around her neck and squeezed and loved her and cooed the elfin word "*W-o-o-n-a*" won the landlady to the child for all time.

"I have named her Woona, as that seems the only word she knows," explained Joe, "and she is now Woona Nilewood;" and the little elf seemed to understand what was being said, for she extended her tiny arms

out toward Joe and smiled in her irresistible way. Joe took her, and after pressing her to his heart and mothering her in his uncouth way, tossed her up in the air; and the way she did enjoy this play-exercise and just cooed and smiled at them all! The little waif now had four staunch and loyal friends—Joe, Mrs. Turner, Julene, and Jasper.

“Oh, Senor Nilewood! I just know that we will all love the child;” and Julene again took the little one from Joe and tossed her up and played with her. It was arranged for the child to sleep with Julene, as the maid begged to be allowed that pleasure.

Joe was now very happy, and felt like telling the whole world to go straight to—well, Fort Worth will do. He was up early the next morning and the little stranger was up and playing around in the dining-room and in the reception-room. As soon as she saw Joe, she just screamed with delight and ran to him and held out her pretty brown arms and cooed to be taken up. What joy this brought to the strong man’s lonely heart, as he gathered the child to his bosom and just loved and cooed to her like a young mother crooning over her first-born! Breakfast was soon ready, and Joe insisted on keeping the child on his lap and feeding her. This sight was a rich morsel for the women boarders, and soon all the gossiping tongues in town were wagging at a furious rate. Very few of the townspeople believed Joe’s story, but as they had nothing to the contrary, all they could do was to wait—and gossip. There was nothing in the law to prohibit anyone from adopting a child if he or she so elected. Joe’s manly and humane stand and attitude toward the little waif soon won the more liberal and civilized ones over to him.

Joe had never attended church since running away from his Uncle Henry’s, but now he understood the beautiful and touching words of the Teacher of Galilee: “*Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.*” Each word of this beautiful sentence now seemed like baby fingers twining around his heart and growing zig-zag across his soul. The church people were the ones who were the loudest in their sneers and denunciations. Those who had the least *religion* had the most humanity.

When Joe was ready to depart for the office, Woona just could not be pacified—she just moaned and cried to go with him, and he took her with him to the office. On the way down he bought some fruit and sugar, and he knew where to get real cream; so the kid was supremely happy and played around the office perfectly happy and contented; and every day she played herself farther into Joe’s great heart. They became inseparable

and Joe found time to teach her many things. She was exceedingly bright and learned as if by intuition.

It wasn't long till the railway officials heard of Joe's find, and one morning the Superintendent and Roadmaster dropped off No. 2 to pay Joe a brief visit. These strong and hardy men were true Westerners, and the sight of the pretty little waif contentedly playing about the office at once touched their great hearts. Mr. Melvin, the Superintendent, went over to the child and held out his hands toward her and cooed at her. She seemed to intuitively recognize everyone who was friendly and sincere, for she immediately tottered to her feet and ran to him with her pretty brown hands extended and cooed softly at him. That settled it; for if there was anything soft and tender about the hard and precise business man of the world, it was the love of children and a deep respect for all good women. He reached down and picked the little waif up, and she nestled her little face up against his and hugged him ardently and softly cooed and smiled at him with her deep and weirdly brilliant eyes that just danced like the stars at a primeval picnic.

"Why, Mr. Nilewood, she's a wonderful child—a real mascot!" and the official shook Joe's hand in a way that made it all right so far as the company was concerned. "Are you trying to find the child's parents?" tentatively asked the Superintendent.

"No; I'm not a bit anxious to find them, for the child has captured my heart and I should hate awfully to have to give her up;" and then he reached down and took her up in his arms and pressed her to his heart.

"I sure don't blame you, Joe," softly said the Roadmaster, and he was struggling with some vagrant tears that just would come to his eyes. He had lost his wife and only child, a pretty little girl about three years old, a few years ago, and the old wounds were reluctant to heal. He looked hungrily at the child and asked Joe if he wanted to adopt her out.

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Joe. "This kid's a part of me—the best part, and I wouldn't give her up for the whole world;" and the child squeezed him tighter than ever, for she seemed to intuitively understand everything.

After the two officials returned from a trip around town among the business element, they returned in time to take No. 5 back to El Paso.

"Joe, the people are certainly enjoying your role as stepfather to a castaway, as they designate the child;" and the Superintendent smiled good-naturedly. "It's all right tho, my boy, and I'm proud of you and the stand you've taken; so just pay no attention to the gossips and heathen."

"I don't intend to. I've merely done my duty, and am well satisfied

with my role—even if it is a little novel and startling,” replied Joe.

“You’re a real 100 per cent man, Joe, and I’m proud to call you my friend,” said Mr. Peters, the Roadmaster, as they departed.

CHAPTER V.

A MINISTERIAL CALL.

Joe was now the happiest man in Texas—the railway officials were with him and endorsed his humane action in promptly adopting the child; and Mr. Peters even wanted to adopt the child. Almost every day Woona accompanied Joe to the stopo and remained till he carried her home at night. He stocked the office with the few things the child needed to eat, and it was a pretty sight to see the strong man mothering the wee bit of driftwood humanity that Fate had wafted to his door. He fairly worshiped the child and never tired of her. She grew right into his great heart, that had been so empty and hungry before she drifted into it and thus changed his whole life. The story soon became known in railway circles, and every trainman that ran thru Pecos soon loved the little waif and would play with her when he had a minute to spare; and oh, the candy and fruit and toys and things they brought the kid! and how supremely happy was the little fairy elf! Only the pious Christians, who professed a belief in Christ and His humane teachings, refused to recognize the child and say a kind word to her. She soon was known from Los Angeles to New Orleans as “*Joe’s Baby*,” and every railroad man and toolt (commercial traveler) was crazy about the kid. Not one of them but would have gladly adopted her if he had a chance to do so. And Joe rose in their respect and good opinion on account of the manly way he was standing by the little waif. The kid grew rapidly and learned everything as if by magic. Before she was three years old she knew the alphabet and could talk plainly. She soon knew every railroad man that worked thru there, and could call each one of the boys by name or by his nickname, and this greatly pleased these ruff but manly fellows. She called Joe “*Daddy Joe*,” and this was very sweet and pleasing to him. As long as he had Woona’s love and the respect and good opinion of his fellow-railroadmen and the officials, he didn’t care a damn what the pious but *soulless* hypocrites thot about the matter.

One day No. 8 (a freight) was pulling in, and Bob Weston, a short and stubby brakeman, dropped off the front end of it as it was passing the stopo, and Woona happened to be standing in the door, and she ran out to him waving her hands and hailed him with: “*Hello, Blobby!*” This caused the ruff fellow to nearly die with laffter, and he gathered the

kid up in his arms and carried her into the office and said to Joe: "Joe, this dauter of yours hailed me as *Blobby!*"

"She has the Chinese habit of getting plenty of *l*'s in her words;" and Joe patted her head and "*Blobby*" continued to love her and pet her.

Weston also had some shelled pine-nuts for her, and of these she was very fond. Whenever he went thru Pecos he was hailed as "*Blobby*," so the trainmen, and even the Roadmaster and Superintendent, came to call him "*Blobby*." And that "*Blobby*" was the sweetest music to Bob Weston.

About seven months after Joe had acquired his little treasure a meddlesome Methodist minister of the lidding variety called on Joe in company with three antiquated females of the same snooping species. They were very pious and believed that the Deity needed their services and *advice* in running the universe. They believed that everything needed to be lidded except their *own meddlesome noses*. Joe and Woona and Julene were out on the grass up at the boarding-house one Sunday afternoon when these four *soulless* fossils hove to and looked askance at the child.

The minister very stiffly addressed Joe thusly: "Ah—er—Mr. Nilewood, we have been doing much thinking about your strange case and have asked God's guidance in the matter, and we feel it our duty to tell you that you should send that—er—stray child to an orphan asylum, where it can be raised in the fear of the Lord;" and the pious old renegade and calico-chaser crossed himself and rolled his eyes heavenward and sighed deeply.

"Yes, Brother Nilewood," chipped in one of the old ladies, "the child surely needs the care of a woman and to be brot up under Christian influences."

Joe just stared at these loathsome meddlers in astonishment, and his face went white and his teeth set like a bob-cat's as it is eyeing a dog that has it treed. "And I think that you meddlesome hypocrites had better go home and mind your own business—if you have any, and if you haven't any, get something legitimate to do," he said. "You are only cold and soulless jokes masquerading in the name of Christ. The great Teacher of Galilee never said a word about putting little children in orphan asylums, where heartless Christians starve and work them to death and then piously call it 'a Christian education'!"

"But you say you don't even know who the mother of the—er—child is," persisted the Rev. Noseum.

"No, and I don't care a damn who she is," answered Joe; "but I do know who the mothers of two of your illegitimate and deserted children

are—back in Indiana, where you used to disgrace the Master by your libidinous and unmanly conduct. Mrs. Marguerite Sloan is the name of the mother of your son, and Mrs. Agatha Blum is the mother of a daughter by your saintly self. Why don't you have them sent to an orphan asylum? And if these good souls and fellow-snoopers of yours want the present addresses of those two women, I can supply them with the same."

"Sisters, I reckon we'd better be going, for this seems to be no place for the Lord's workers to tarry." And the four quietly blew away.

"Oh, but wouldn't I like to have tickled that pious old tarantula with the butcher-knife!" exclaimed Julene in a rage of wrath.

"The idea of those pious and sanctified old cats saying the child needed the care of a woman! I wonder what she thinks we all are here?" and Mrs. Turner's eyes flashed like vagrant lightning.

Nearly all the women boarders were coming over and taking an interest in the child; and Mrs. Turner and Julene were as crazy about the kid as Joe was. She called the landlady "*Tanty Tunner*," and Julene was designated as "*Tant Jelene*," and Jasper was "*Unky Jaffer*"; but they all enjoyed these names from Woonah. She was the mascot of the place, and it was indeed a hard heart that could keep the kid out of it. Besides being very bright and lovable, she was a natural musician and humorist, and said many unique and original things that kept them all laughing when she was around. Joe had taught her so many things that by the time she was five years old and started to school she utterly astonished the teachers and other pupils; and she was a real little athlete, as Joe had taught her everything he knew in the way of athletics and health. She could jump up and turn over and light on her feet like an old circus performer, and could swim like a duck, and ride anything that went on legs, wheels, fins, or wings; and every dog and cat would instinctively follow her and play with the little hoiden; and she seemed absolutely devoid of fear, and had the most remarkable sight and hearing of any human that ever lived.

Joe soon had a chance to get back at the Methodists. They had a big box of hymn-books, Bibles, and Sunday-school lesson leaves shipped in from the East, and when the Rev. Noseum sent a drayman down to the stopo to get the junk and tote it up to the church, he told Joe the Rev. Noseum said he'd "*be down in a few days and pay the charges on it.*"

"Nothin' doin'!" said Joe. "If they want that junk, they'll have to come across with the cash first. They know it's against the rules of the company to let anything go out till the charges on it are paid; they think they'll sting me for the amount, but the mean, dirty-souled boobs have another guess drifting their way."

In a few days a rather good-looking young dame came down and was so polite and sugary to Joe that he didn't realize what she was up to till she tried to get the stuff out without paying the charges.

"But you ought to favor the church, Mr. Nilewood, and be willing to help us who are working for the Lord," brazenly coaxed the jade.

"If you boobs are working for the Lord, He ought to be able to pay his freight bills?" returned Joe sarcastically.

"You're just as hard-hearted as the heathen," fired the damsel back at him.

"Perhaps, but I am not heathen enough to want to send a poor little orphan child to an asylum to be killed with Christian kindness." This shot finished the seance, and the sky-girl slowly wended her way toward town.

Now we will see if we can't find out who Woonna really was and how she came to Joe so mysteriously.

CHAPTER VI. WOONNA'S PARENTS.

Yes, of course the child had parents, and her mother was still living and grieving her heart out over the loss of her child. She had been searching high and low for a little more than five years before she found a clew to the child's whereabouts.

Pemberton La Verne was Woonna's father, and the child was born in Mexico. The mother was a Miss Elna Verlos, of Havana, Cuba. The father was mostly French, with a distant strain of Irish blood. The mother was a famous beauty and opera singer of Spanish and Indian extraction when she met Monsieur La Verne on a visit he was making to Cuba in the interests of a large firm in Montreal, with which he was closely connected as a partner. After a brief courtship, the young Frenchman won and married the singer in the Cuban capital, Havana. He took his bride with him on his journey, which also took in South America and Australia, and thence to San Francisco. They tarried in the California city a month, when he received a letter from his house to proceed forthwith to northern Mexico and look after their recently acquired mines and other valuable properties. The couple proceeded to El Paso, and thence into the land of trouble and beauty. About seven months after their arrival in Mexico they were blessed with a beautiful little dauter—our beloved little Woonna. They were very happy, for the child was all and more than they expected—a wonder dream of beauty and exquisite loveliness.

Soon after the birth of the baby wild and bloody revolution broke out

pretty much all over that unhappy land of natural wealth and unsurpassed beauty. Monsieur La Verne's investments had turned out well, and he thus added many millions to his own pockets as well as to the credit of his partners. Everything was moving along like an oiled dream until Senor Villa and many other restless spirits broke loose and inaugurated a reign of terrorism—and against all foreigners. La Verne was captured and shot, and his beautiful and talented young wife was carried away by a young lieutenant of Villa's, who was easily affected by female loveliness. A renegade American in his army stole the little girl one day while the army was resting near Juarez. He was tired of the life as an assassin of foreigners, and had conceived a great liking for the child, so he took the kid with him and lit out for El Paso, Texas. He felt safe enuff after he got on American soil, but the Mexican officer who held the mother at once dispatched two officers after the fleeing kidnaper, with instructions to kill him if necessary, but at any rate recover the child and bring it back to its suffering mother. He was very solicitous of the mother; the fact is, he had an ax to grind and needed the kid to turn the grindstone for him. He realized the only way he could prevent the mother from killing herself was to restore her child to her.

Robert Stanton was the American who had abducted the child, for he figured that the mother would soon be killed, and then the kid would likely be dispatched in the same way. He lived with these renegades long enuff to understand them, and realized the danger that threatened the little girl, who was only one year and ten months old. Stanton happened to see the two officers from the guerrilla army across the border, and it didn't take him long to guess what they were over on this side for. He had very little means and didn't dare wait for a train east or north, so he stole a high-power car and proceeded to burn up the roads leading eastward. It happened that the owner of the car saw him whiz past and recognized his car; so he reported to the police, and soon the sheriff and two deputies were in hot pursuit in another car. The two Mexican officers had procured mounts and were also on Stanton's trail. As he only had about forty minutes the start of his pursuers, he realized that he had no chance for escape, and to be caught would mean a double charge against him—kidnaping and stealing a car. Stanton could easily see his finish in any event, and the kid would be lost to him anyway. He deserted the car about two miles above Pecos and carried the child down the river, and was just passing the station as he saw the agent (Joe) unlock and go in; so he hid around the corner, and when Joe went in and was calling the Superintendent and reporting on duty, Stanton slipped in and set the kid

down near the open door, and then beat it. The child naturally toddled on into the office and, as it was very hungry, tried to climb up in Joe's lap.

Bob Stanton walked slowly thru the residence section, and as he was passing a barn that opened out on an alley he looked in; all it contained was a cow that had not been milked yet that morning. Bob had a tin cup with him, and he soon had a light breakfast of rich milk. Then he climbed up in the haymow, and was soon asleep and dreaming of his old home back in Ohio. He remained in the barn and boarded with that cow for three days, and then he slipped out one morning directly after the train from the East came in. He mingled with the incoming passengers and sauntered up town and filled up at a restaurant—and it is a safe bet that he took coffee instead of *milk*. That night he took the train east and never stopped till he reached Fort Worth. There he got a job with a cattleman and went right out to the ranch, where he intended to lay low till he got enuff to carry him back to Ohio.

The American officers found the car and returned it to its owner, but didn't make much of an effort to find the thief; in fact, they were too busy to waste much time on such small game; and as the owner had recovered his machine, what did it matter? They did not know he had a child with him. They guessed that he was some poor devil escaping from Mexico, and their sympathy was with him. The Mexican officers did not reveal their errand to the authorities in El Paso, but counted on finding their quarry and quietly killing him, and thus getting the child without the American officers knowing anything about it. Of course, they found no trace of the fleeing Stanton in Pecos—nor any place else; so, after about a week, they gave it up and returned across the Rio Grande at another point. After about six months with the Mexican lieutenant and his gang, that cuss received a wound that put him out of the running, and Villa sent him back to Torreon.

With the aid of two Mexican girls, Mrs. La Verne escaped to the American side one night, and soon found her way to El Paso. The lieutenant had told her truthfully that her child had been stolen by an American and carried to the United States. He informed her that his men were on his track and she would soon regain her child, and then he promised to release her. He did not tell her that his emissaries had returned empty-handed and the search for the child had been abandoned. He pretended to receive reports from them, etc. After his wounds had caused him to be sent away, she learned the truth about the Mexicans returning with no clue as to the whereabouts of the lost child. She felt sure the child still lived, and her only mission in life was to find it. She immediately com-

municated with her husband's relatives and partners in Montreal and acquainted them with the facts in the case. She had managed to secrete large sums of money about her person, and now had ample means to prosecute her search for the baby. Her husband's relatives came to her aid and furnished her all the means she needed and any other help she might need. She remained in El Paso for about three weeks, but could find no trace of Vencie, as the child was named. Then she gradually worked up to Los Angeles and remained there for more than four years, conducting the search from that delightful City of Eternal Summer. One day she and some friends were out to Pasadena, and while out in one of its beautiful parks she heard a conversation that passed between two railroad men who were on a short vacation and were out parking that day.

"It is sure the most wonderful little girl I ever saw, and it is no wonder that Joe is just daffy about it," said one of the men.

"I sure must see that wonderberry the first time I go thru Pecos," returned his companion. "And no one knows where the child came from nor how she got in the stopo?" continued the second man, Dave Spencer.

"Not a thing is known about the kid—it just seemed to drop down from Heaven and creep right into Joe's heart; and he wouldn't take the world for the little elf—and neither would I if she were mine."

"You say Joe is also the mayor of Pecos?"

"Yes, and as clean and as white a man as ever lived. Everybody likes him, except a few of the pious folks who think the child is his own and illegitimate. This is his second term as mayor, and he will surely be re-elected if he cares to run again."

Mrs. La Verne drank in these words like a traveler quaffs water in the burning desert. She pretended that she did not hear them, but every word was seared on her heart and brain. She hurriedly made arrangements to go to Pecos and interview the mayor, whom she just knew as Joe—the stopo agent and a very white and honest man. She felt sure the child that Joe had adopted was her own little Vencie. She was greatly relieved to know that her child was in such good hands.

CHAPTER VII.

JOE'S MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

One fine morning in late April, when the atmosphere was redolent with the fragrance from millions of flowers, and the birds just seemed bent on serenading the whole world, a very pretty and distinguished-looking young woman alighted from No. 4 and quietly strolled into the waiting-room and peeped into the tilk (ticket office), and then stood and watched

the train depart. It was about 11:40 a. m. Joe soon came in with a couple of mail-sacks and some railway mail for himself.

The strange and beautiful lady quietly rose and greeted Joe pleasantly, and with a graceful bow inquired: "Senor, can you direct me to a good boarding-house—one that is first-class?"

"Why, yes, I reckon I can, as there is only one such place in town and I live there. I'm going up there in a few minutes and shall be pleased to show you the way and introduce you to Mrs. Turner, the landlady—and a very pleasant woman, too," said Joe courteously.

Joe was always more or less bashful and embarrassed in the presence of a pretty woman, and he began to show signs of it now. Mrs. La Verne noticed that he was a little nervous and rattled, but she only enjoyed it—as a woman invariably does.

"Very well, Senor—"

"Nilewood," supplied Joe, rather awkwardly; and then he did a good stunt at blushing, altho there was really nothing whatever to blush about.

The beautiful little lady was polite and courteous and acted in a refined and kindly dignified way, as became her station and position. But still Joe's nervousness and embarrassment increased with every word they exchanged.

"Who is the mayor of your beautiful little town?" easily went on the lady as they left the stopo and proceeded toward the boarding-house.

"Why—er— that is, I happen to have that doubtful honor;" and poor Joe blushed again more than ever.

"Oh, indeed! Then I'm doubly delighted to meet you, Mayor Nilewood. What a beautiful name you have, Senor Nilewood;" and she beamed on him with such a bright and fascinating smile that he almost blushed his head off.

"Names don't count for much out in this sand-blown wilderness," replied Joe, with a desperate effort to get control of himself and appear natural and easy, as became the chief executive of the town; but his nerves seemed a bit unmanageable.

"Oh, what a lovely location for a living-place!" exclaimed his companion as he pointed out the place away up near the sky-line and with a sweeping and commanding view of the Pecos valley for more than fifty miles to the south and about twenty-five miles to the north.

"Why, yes; it is—is very pleasant up there, and we always have a good breeze sighing thru the vines and trees;" and Joe looked far away to the great Invisible Valhalla just beyond the horizon.

"Ah! our good mayor is something of a poet and dreamer, I observe;" and she gave him another look that almost lassoed his Nancy animal.

"Oh really, no, Miss—"

"Elna Verlos-La Verne," supplied the little woman, with a smile that had Joe's goat following it.

"Oh! then you've been married?" politely asked Joe, before he realized what he was saying; but it was too late now.

"Oh, yes; and my poor husband and I and our little girl were captured by Villa's brigands about five years ago. They shot my husband and held me a prisoner nearly six months, when I managed to escape to American soil by the help of two Mexican women. About a week after our capture, an American who was with the brigands stole our little Vencie and escaped with her to the States; but we have never been able to find a trace of him nor the child. I have searched high and low for the child, but have been unable to find the slightest trace of her. And oh, Senor Nilewood, my life is so empty without her!" and the poor distressed creature wept bitter tears.

This was too much for Joe, and as he realized that he had at last found his little Woonna's mother, his emotions were indeed strange and intense.

"You've surely had a bitter experience, madam, but I think I can soon restore your child to you;" and he gave her a look of tenderness that went straight to the bottom of her heart.

"Oh, Senor Nilewood, you almost frighten me! Is it possible you have a clew to the whereabouts of my dauter?" and the poor soul-sick mother gave him such an appealing look that Joe immediately surrendered and returned a smiling and hopeful look.

"Yes, Senora La Verne; I can do better than furnish you with a clew—I can place your child in your arms in a few minutes!"

"Oh, Senor Nilewood, you have made me the happiest woman in all the world! Tell me—where is my child?" and she was almost frantic with joy.

"Well, I think she is up at the boarding-house, having a fine time and bossing the ranch and being spoiled by everyone;" and Joe tried to laff and look happy, but his heart was fast sinking into his boots as he saw his little idolized treasure slipping away from him—forever.

Then Joe briefly related the finding of Woonna, and how the little elf just crept right into his heart and won him, and how he adopted the

child and gave her his name, and how he came to give her the name of Woona.

"Oh, how strange and beautiful, Senor Nilewood! and how I shall ever revere your name for the humanity you have shown my baby—but for you, she might have perished or fallen in evil hands!" and the happy mother sighed and clung to his hand like a trusting child clings to its mother.

"I am so glad to have been of service to you, senora, but it will indeed be a blow to give up my little treasure now. She has been my very life now for nearly five years—in fact, the best part of me, and I just idolize the little thing. She just smiled her way right into my soul the first time I saw her, and now to give her up—" Here Joe's throat filled up with something or other he tried hard to swallow, but it was no use; it just wouldn't be swallowed, and the tears, those measley old tell-tale tears, just would seep and flow.

"There, there, senor; it *may* not be *necessary* for you to lose the child at all;" and the mother smiled at him thru her happy tears.

"Oh, I hope it won't!" and the strong man shook like an aspen leaf with a spider cake-walking it.

"Ah! there she is now, senora!" cried Joe as he spied Woona playing with a pet jack-rabbit in the yard.

"Oh, what a big girl she is *now*!" was all the mother could find to say.

"Why, to be sure—she's nearly seven years old now, and growing like mesquite in the foot-hills."

"Hello, Woona!" was Joe's greeting to his little pet.

"'Ello, *Daddy Joe*!" and her lithe little limbs just flew down the path to meet him and jump up and throw her pretty, graceful arms around his neck and just squeeze and love him all the way up to the house.

Joe took her up in his strong and loving arms and carried her as he always did when she came to meet him. She had only just returned from the nearby school for her dinner, and had stopped to play with Pedro, as the rabbit was named.

"Woona dear," Joe said softly, "here is a lady that I want you to love and trust just like you do me, for she is *your mother*!"

"Why, Daddy Joe! you said I had no mamma—you told me that you was all I had to love;" and the child looked at him quizzically, and then shyly glanced up at her mother, who was holding out both hands toward the child, with her heart in one eye and her soul in the other one.

"Won't you come and kiss mamma?" pleaded the happy woman.

But Woonah hesitated, and went and clung to Joe, and asked him with her eyes: "*Is she really my very own mamma, Daddy Joe?*"

"Yes, dear, she is your own mother, and is going to love you just like I do; so you must love her just like you do me and Julene—and the others. Go and kiss your mother now, and tell her that you will love and trust her;" and Joe kissed the child and led her toward her mother, who was waiting and holding out her arms toward the child.

Mrs. La Verne's eloquent and beautiful eyes pleaded for her soul. Woonah hesitated a moment longer, and looked the woman steadily in the eyes as tho searching her soul, and then she leapt into her mother's arms and was just smothered with kisses and caresses, which she shyly returned, and then she hid her pretty head on the woman's breast and sighed happily.

This strange and remarkable reunion of Mrs. La Verne and her lost daughter, after five years of separation, was witnessed by nearly all the boarders who were out on the wide veranda awaiting the summons of the dinner-bell. The dinner-bell nor any other bell would not have distracted their attention from this strange scene that was being enacted before their eyes; so, when Julene came out with her jingling bell, she forgot what she came out for and became one of the spectators.

After the very affecting scene between the mother and daughter, the little elf took Joe's hand in one of hers and her mother's hand in her other one and thus marched them up to the portico, and calmly announced that she had found her mother at last—that "*Daddy Joe found her and brought her up to me.*" Then Joe introduced the mother by her proper name and briefly explained the case.

Mrs. La Verne bowed courteously to them all as she acknowledged the introduction, and said simply: "You can never know what joy I feel in finding my darling child again."

Mrs. Turner was introduced, and received the mother cordially and gave her a welcome that at once put her at her ease. As the house was full up, Joe at once placed his own room at Mrs. La Verne's disposal, but Julene would not hear of that, and at once surrendered her own artistic little nest.

"No, my dear," said Mrs. La Verne; "I would not rob you of your room, but I will gladly share it with you, if you will permit?" and she gave Julene a look that made the little maid very happy.

"*Si, senora*; I should be delighted to share it with you—if you will be so gracious as to want me?" was her response.

"To be sure I want you, *senorita*; and Woonna can sleep right between us;" and a look of joy overspread her face like a summer dream.

"*Oui, madam*; and it will be a joy to have *Mademoiselle Woonna* between us, for I love her as if she were my own child," returned the little maid, with a fervent look in her pretty brown eyes.

So it was arranged, and everybody was happy. And oh, what flower-scented dreams the Mayor of Pecos had that night; but that's another story.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO DREAMS THAT CAME TRUE.

The Mayor of Pecos wasn't the only one who had rainbow dreams that night—no, indeed! The beautiful little widow, Elna Verlos-La Verne also had some mighty roseate dreams that night with her little dauter in her arms—when the kid wasn't in Julene's arms. The child had always bunked with the maid, and of course was very much attached to the girl, and Julene was just daffy about Woonna; so it was a happy and beautiful night all around.

They were all up bright and early as usual, and Woonna sat at table that morning between Daddy Joe and her beautiful and distinguished mother, of whom the child was growing very fond. After breakfast Elna seated herself at the new piano and for an hour just simply poured out her soul in the divinest music ever heard in Pecos. She sang all the old love-songs she used to sing on the stage and in her own little dream nest in Los Angeles. The Mayor of Pecos was about forty-five minutes late that morning, but just how he explained it to the Superintendent is none of our business; so I'm not going to even ask Joe how he squared himself. And Joe was so upset and happy now he didn't care anything about jobs. There were only two things in all this world that interested Joe at present, and they were Woonna and her mother. How to keep them both with him, as well as in his heart, was the problem that was doing an elegant job of probing just then. "Ye gods! but isn't she beautiful—and fair? No wonder Woonna is a thorobred and can out-distance them all. And oh, how she can warbble! And, of course, she can also *love* just as ardently. Joe, old boy, it's up to you to derail her before she gets out in the clear again. Oh, what joy if I can only win her and get to keep Woonna!" and he fairly hugged himself with joy.

At last Joe just had to kiss Woonna good-bye and hurry to the stopo. She and Elna both promised to come down to the station that afternoon when school was out, and stay with him till closing time, and then walk

home with him. Ah! what joy this arrangement gave Joe all that day, and how he counted the minutes till they would arrive!

At last he heard the sweet little voice he had become so used to for nearly five years, and when he detected another footstep with Woona's his heart began to buck and scare like a nervous animal when it first sees a locomotive.

"Hello, Daddy Joe! here we is;" and the little elf was soon in his strong arms and loving him like she always did on meeting him—either at the office or at the house. "And see what beautiful flowers mamma and I have picked just for you;" and she continued to love and kiss him and sit on his lap.

The dispatcher was trying desperately to get Joe, but he just turned in "25" and forgot all about dispatchers and railroads—and everything else except Woona and Elna. But the dispatcher kept right after him and calmly disregarded his "25" signal, which means, in railroad parlance, "The line is busy with other business." Joe soon got the dispatcher's troubles straightened out, and turned to his companions—and loved ones.

"Papa, mamma and I just ain't ever going to leave you, and we won't let her ever go away again—will we?" and the child slipped her mother's trembling hand into Joe's nervous one, and said: "Now, you two just kiss and make up, for I need you *both!*" and she then wound a pretty arm around both their necks and just smiled and looked supremely happy.

"I'm sure I'm willing," embarrassedly admitted Joe, and he gave Elna such an unutterable look of love and entreaty that she just hung her pretty head and simply said, "Y-e-s."

Then Joe forgot that he was the Mayor of Pecos and the station agent and the express agent, and just gathered the beautiful Elna in his strong and hungry arms and murmured: "*My precious love! My darling Elna! I love and adore you, and you have made me the greatest and happiest man on earth!*" and he continued to squeeze and caress her. At the same time he folded one arm around Woona and drew her up to him, and said: "Little sweetheart, you will never again lose your mamma, and we will all three live together, and I will always be your *Daddy Joe.*"

"Oh, Joe, my very own Joe, my love and all, you've made me the happiest woman in all the world! You've given back to me my little girl, and a *husband* at the same time. Was ever a woman so supremely happy, I wonder?" and Elna wound one arm around Joe and the other circled Woona in a fond embrace.

Then Joe and Elna's lips got tangled up in one of those primeval and

vine-tangled kisses that just slip right thru the soul and clinch themselves on the other side—and then sing alto with the fragrance of the wild flowers and the sunset-silence of the Pecos hills. And oh, how Elna could play Ty Cobb ball at the kissing game! She was an artist of the Rubens school, and knew how to insensibly shade her kisses off into that fine and invisible soul-frenzy that gives life its *immortal* flavor. Then Woonna got up on a chair and wound one arm around each of their necks and proceeded to do a rare and radiant kissing stunt herself. First Joe's cheek would get one, and then Elna's blushing cheek would get one. The child was so transported with joy that they just had to pry themselves loose from her clinging embraces.

"Oh, Daddy Joe and Mamma—"

"*Just mamma, dear,*" corrected Elna, with a painful blush.

"But why won't you be *Mamma Joe?*" persisted the child, with a puzzled look on her beautiful and happy face.

"Just because I won't, darling. I'm just mamma—and nothing else."

"It's about closing time, and when we get up to the house I suppose it will be up to me to announce the glad tidings?" queried Joe, with a look of embarrassment at his affianced's face.

"Yes, of course, you must inform Mrs. Turner and your intimate friends that your liberty is drawing to a close," naively smiled Elna. Then they both laffed a jolly duet.

"But when will the happy event take place?" blushing asked Joe.

"Well, under the peculiar and embarrassing circumstances, I suppose the sooner the better?" tentatively replied Elna.

"It can't be too soon to suit me," smiled Joe happily. "I think to-morrow noon would be a good time, and I can see Judge Mason when he comes in on No. 2 to-morrow forenoon, and make arrangements for him to perform the ceremony. You and Woonna can come down to the office about ten-thirty, and we will then go to the Judge's office in the courthouse and have it all over with by eleven; I will arrange with Mrs. Turner to have a bang-up wedding dinner ready for us at twelve, and after dinner we can all go down to the office and spend the afternoon together; and that night we will take in the theater. There, how does that strike your fancy?" asked Joe, in his open and breezy Western way.

"You certainly know how to arrange things so as to give the grass no chance to grow under our feet;" and she slipped her hand in his and gave it the kind of a squeeze that knows where the heart is located. "I like your executive way, dear Joe, and you may go ahead and arrange it as you have outlined it to me."

Then Joe locked up the stopo, and with Woonna on one side of him and Elna on the other side the trio slowly and lovingly wound their way up the hill to Mrs. Turner's. They were in no hurry, and gathered wild flowers along the way and mooned along like happy lovers always do. Time was never made for lovers—nor for happy people. They wished to arrive at the boarding-house after the other boarders were thru and out of the dining-room. Joe would find it much easier to make the announcement just to Mrs. Turner and Julene than to make it to the whole gawking bunch. When they arrived the others were all thru and gone, or were loitering out in the yard.

Mrs. Turner and Julene were alone in the dining-room and quietly eating their suppers when the truants arrived, and Joe began to blush so confusedly that Mrs. Turner smiled broadly and said: "Oh, we can guess what the good news is, Mr. Nilewood; but if you want to repeat it, we shall be delighted to hear it;" and then they all smiled, and poor Joe continued to blush like a school-boy trying to let the teacher know how much he likes her.

"Well, Mrs. Turner, you've called the turn on the news I have up my—I—er—mean *our* sleeves;" and he looked happy and foolish at his soul-pard. "The event is scheduled to take place to-morrow at eleven in the county judge's office, and of course I—er—I mean *we* should be pleased to have you and Julene as our witnesses."

"Oh! won't that be grand?" exclaimed Julene as Woonna climbed on her lap and just silently laid her pretty cheek against the maid's face and looked happy. Mrs. Turner also gladly accepted the invitation, and also agreed to arrange the dinner to be given at 1 p. m.—after the others would be gone.

The news soon leaked out, and a rumor knows how to travel fast—as we all know. When Joe and Elna and Woonna were seen trying to slip into the court-house the next forenoon, it seemed that the whole town was there ahead of them. They had plenty of witnesses all right. The event caused the profoundest sensation that the little town ever had, and Joe had to remain and receive the congratulations of his fellow-townsmen. It was a memorable event, and even the city dailies played it up in big type on their front pages. Joe was about an hour and forty minutes late getting back to the stopo that afternoon.

"What in the world is the matter, Joe?" asked the Superintendent as soon as Joe got back on the wire.

"Oh! nothin' much—just took a little while off to get married; but I promise it won't happen *again*;" and Joe smiled at his own little joke.

"Well, I hope it won't happen again," fired the Superintendent right back at him. "Accept my hearty congratulations and good wishes. Do you want a vacation and a honeymoon trip?" asked the Superintendent.

"Not just now; but when my term as mayor expires, on May 10th, I'll want a long vacation," wired Joe back to him.

CHAPTER IX.

MAYOR JOE'S RESIGNATION.

The Superintendent wired later that day that he would be down on No. 2 the next day and pay Joe a brief visit. That afternoon at the office was a very happy one for the three of them, and as Joe attended to his duties they planned their future. Joe was surely astonished when he learned that his wife possessed much valuable property and more than a million in cash. Her property holdings were easily worth two million.

"Dear husband, I have just a dream of a little bungalow in Los Angeles, and it is already furnished and ready for us—and I should like to go there and live; and as I have many times more than we can ever use, we can just relax and be happy loving one another and educating Woona;" and Elna gave him one of those long and taste-forever kisses that keep the grass green and the flowers fragrant.

"It is a very pleasant surprise, dear Elna, to learn that you are so rich; and as I also have enuff for us to live on, and am capable of making a living for us, I had no hesitancy in asking you to share my lonely life; but the greatest wealth I have or want is your love and Woona's love and confidence. I didn't know what real life and happiness is until she walked into my empty life that morning," said Joe.

"And your love of my child, and the noble way you took her in and adopted her and gave her your name, and shielded her from all slander, touched my heart to its uttermost depths and won its pent-up love and devotion," replied Elna. "I knew that you were a real man and civilized, and I consider myself lucky to find such a rare mate—one that I can love and respect at the same time. The possession of your love, dear Joe, is my greatest riches—my one treasure that cannot be taken away from me nor taxed."

So it was arranged for Joe to resign his job with the company when his term as mayor expired on May 10th, and to accompany his wife and Woona to the *City of Eternal Summer* to live. They kept the name of *Woona*, as no other name would do, but put the name *Vencie* in as a middle name; but she was always just *Woona* to Joe, and her mother never called her by any other name. She developed into a wonderful musician

and singer, and is still living and delighting her mamma and *Daddy Joe*—the three happiest mortals that ever lived.

The pious and bigoted wretches who wanted the poor little waif branded with the word “illegitimate” and placed in a public institution now realized their brutal and stupid mistake and felt thoroly ashamed of themselves—if they had enuff conscience to produce the feeling of shame. The meddlesome old Methodist who wanted Joe to place the child in a public institution had the nerve to try and censure Joe for not having his marriage take place in the M. E. church with him officiating; but Joe cut him short with: “Rev Sky-Chauffeur, go home and preach a real sermon on the text: ‘*Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.*’ And I also suggest that you good Christians practice the *Golden Rule*, of which you prate so much.”

Elna was too intellectual and humane to be religious; so she and her husband agreed on everything, and Woonna was only taught the truth and the great religion of *Kindness* and *Humanity*; and she blossomed into a perfect human flower, and drew all people to her by her intelligence, gentleness, and humanity. A large part of Elna’s wealth was used in helping poor and unfortunate children, and mothers who were unable to care for their little ones. Joe often spoke of his greatest and wisest investment—his love for that poor little waif and his humanity toward a homeless and helpless little child.

LOVE gives the finishing touch of color to life—the *Dream-Music* for the *Soul’s* reverie—it’s the tip-feather on every wing—the *sky-roof* with star shingles—the *Eternal Rainbow* braided with *Morning Glories* and arching the world *Forever*

THE END.

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